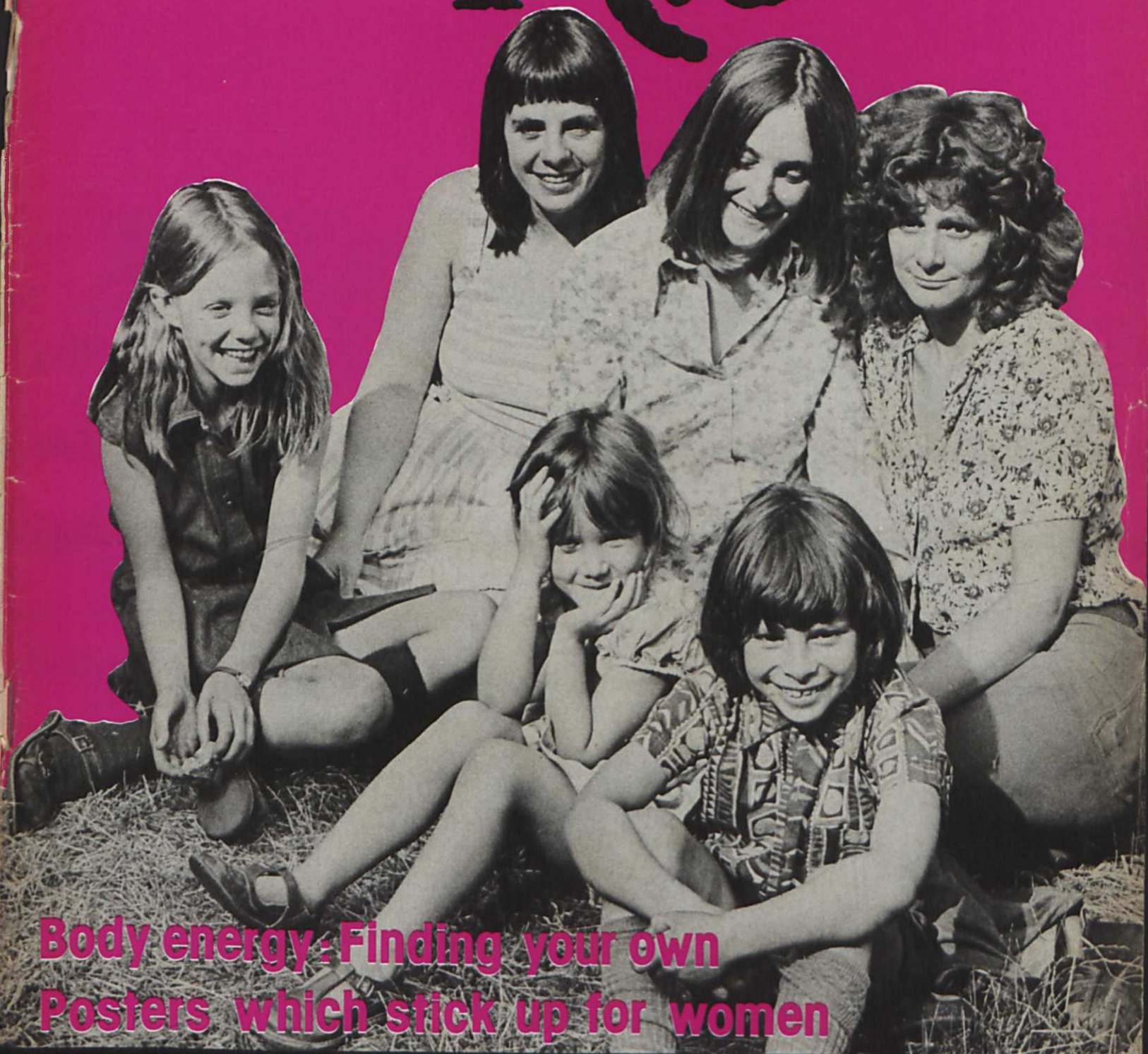


**Why could one of these women lose custody
of her child? LESBIAN MOTHERS IN COURT**

A WOMEN'S LIBERATION MAGAZINE SEPT 1976 ISSUE 50 30 PENCE

spare Rib



**Body energy: Finding your own
Posters which stick up for women**

**Abortion: Commons committee turns clock back
Backstreet abortions: "Some of us had 3 or 4"**

'Joan Armatrading' is one of the most original albums of '76. But will you listen?

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Joan Armatrading.

She deserves a lot more recognition.

Just listen to the album.



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Spare Rib is produced collectively by Rose Ades, Anny Brackx, Alison Fell, Victoria Green, Sue Hobbs, Wisty Hoyland, Susan Lambert, Laura Margolis, Jill Nicholls, Rosie Parker, Linda Phillips, Jane Prince, Eleanor Stephens.

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Sword Fighting in a Chain-Mail Bikini

Dear *Spare Rib*,
We'd like to take up the point about Red Sonja in Dot Walker's Marvel Comics letter. We spent a considerable time in 'Dark They Were And Golden-Eyed' trying to find non-sexist illustrations for the SF article, and in the end passed this impossible task on to *Spare Rib*, who found an illustrator. We had, in fact, considered Red Sonja, but although it's really nice to have such a superhera, we decided against using her — one, because she's shown as being treacherous and mercenary (a typical sexist attitude towards women), and two, because we feel there are distinct overtones of sado-masochism and fetishism in her depiction. Can you really imagine riding a horse and swordfighting in a chain-mail bikini? (It miraculously stays on without being fastened at the back!) Jarella in the Incredible Hulk wears much more practical garb, but she isn't a *dominant* character.

We're not knocking Marvel especially, but would just like to comment on the less obvious aspects of their female characterisations.

Love and sisterhood
Marion Linwood and
Terri Goddard
Hounslow
Middx

Female Eunuchs ★

Dear *Spare Rib*,
I am one of the women you never write about.

At the age of twelve I was examined internally by numerous male doctors whilst suffering from acute peritonitis (pain, vomit and green sticky discharge to name but a few of the symptoms). My left ovary had turned into an abscess and was infecting the rest of me like some rotten apple in a fruit basket. In order that I should live, the offensive organ was removed, I cannot describe the agony and the humiliation. Apparently this infection had been caused by two bouts of peritonitis I'd suffered at the age of two and a half years.

Ten years after my first ovary was wrenched out, my right one went the same way. I was neglected for too long by fumbling GPs until it had inflated to the 'size of a coconut' (the surgeon's description not mine) and I again suffered pain, fever, ovarian removal, stomach paralysis, etc., etc., etc. Now I am literally one of the Female Eunuchs.

I'm 26 now and still fighting to get proper hormone replacement therapy. I wrote an indignant letter to the Central Middlesex Hospital last

year. I had been ovary-less for four years and had received no hormone treatment whatsoever. I was suffering from menopausal problems. I had been receiving state psychiatric treatment for severe depression. I had lost half an inch in height.

They shoved me onto the contraceptive pill 'Norinyl 1' and said "Goodbye", after all it contains synthetic oestrogen and progesterone albeit in rather unnecessary amounts and I can now get simulated periods (having still got a uterus), but properly constructed natural hormone treatment is the answer and I'm now trying very hard to get into the Dulwich Menopausal Clinic. Throughout all of this I've found the medical profession to be mainly unsympathetic, in fact indifferent and unwilling to help.

Although I'm all for abortion, I'm all for free contraception and the various maternal plights of being a 'normal' woman have all my sympathies. I cannot feel that I am a woman. How many Female Eunuchs feel the same as I? How many women are suffering unnecessarily because of medical neglect?

Love
Marilyn Skears
London W10

Money is Power

Dear *Spare Rib*,
I was delighted to read in Jill Nicholls' article (SR 47) that at the Newcastle conference it was considered "certainly a priority to organise publicly about housework". While many do not agree with the idea of Wages for Housework, that loudly-voiced demand finally seems to have got the movement thinking about the whole issue — and it's about time.

I agree that "more work needs to be done on how we fight around this . . ." There are some pretty obvious problems involved in the programme sketched out in the article: "to minimise it (housework) by fighting for more socialised facilities, and to raise consciousness about sharing it".

Socialised facilities, under present conditions, are a mixed blessing. Whether provided privately or by the State, they are most often expensive or crummy or both. We are always fighting this situation, but the struggle is inherently slow, fragmented, frustrating and generally uninspiring. It hardly qualifies as a movement-wide action on housework.

Still more serious is the fact that from the point of view of the State the main point of socialised facilities is to enable women to go out to work. So you sell your labour to some employer for so

many hours, and on top of that you work an unpaid split shift doing the housework which has been wonderfully reduced by socialised facilities to the point where a woman with children can hope to do both jobs in 18 hours a day! What is the point of cutting down housework if a woman's *total* workload is unchanged or even increased?

Which of course throws us into the second proposal: "to raise consciousness about sharing it". By all means let's go on arguing with our mates over who does what — but if we're talking about *organised* feminist struggle we come up against some hard realities. Because "consciousness" is not basically the problem. Women don't all live in communes or in couples where both work outside and have equal amounts of time for housework. Many live alone with children or old people; others have mates who are away from home a lot (e.g. lorry drivers) or work long hours of overtime. Other women prefer to stay home with their small children and are automatically saddled with many hours of domestic labour. Others live with men whose consciousness is just not about to be raised: if your mate runs around, gets drunk, beats you up, keeps you short of money, rapes you, sneers at you, etc., there's precious little point in starting an argument over housework.

What these women need is more than consciousness-raising, more than socialised facilities. They need power. How can they get it?

The Wages-for-Housework campaign argues that money is power. Not just the power to buy a washing machine or pay a baby-sitter. It's the power to walk out of a job or a marriage you don't like, the power to tell Social Security snoopers to piss off, the power to insist that your mate stop doing overtime, or change jobs, so he can do his share of the housework. The power of women to work less and to control the conditions of their work.

The Wages-for-Housework campaign has shown us one effective way to "organise publicly about housework". I think now the women's movement should not waste energy quibbling over what and what not to demand — we should welcome the ground-breaking offensive of the Wages-for-Housework campaign and start finding a million more ways of organising on this most basic aspect of women's exploitation and oppression.

Sincerely yours
Joan Hall
Cambridge

Women and Weapons

Dear *Spare Rib*,
I find it extremely distressing that in Angela Phillip's article "I'm Gonna be an Electrical Engineer" (*Spare Rib* 48) no more than a passing reference is made to the fact that this young woman is being trained primarily to construct weapons. Such irresponsibility only strengthens the opinion of those who claim that the women's liberation movement is about levelling women down to be as *bad* as men. Do we really want equality at this price? At a time when your magazine is full of articles about the ways in which the capitalist crisis is denigrating women, how ironic that you appear to be celebrating what is merely another facet of the same contemptuous dismissal of people's lives. Throughout this century the manufacture of armaments has been used by the government to stimulate production in a stagnant economy, and to provide employment for people who might otherwise start to challenge the system. When the war starts, dissidents are dispersed and disposed of, and social movements are silenced. After the war, women are sent back into the home — even if they were electrical engineers (or lorry drivers or fire fighters or . . .) and everybody's revolution is set back another half a century. The uncritical acceptance that employing women in a naval dockyard is not part of such a process is naive, and to ignore it in a feminist magazine is criminal. In sisterhood,
Gail Chester
London SE22

Just a Dumb Female . . . ★

Dear *Spare Rib*,
I guess it's because I'm so pissed off at the moment that I'm writing. I'm just about to take my A levels in Maths, Physics and Chemistry at Poughton College (for boys!). I've been at this school for two years and belong to the second 'lot' of girls who were admitted into this school. This is the third year they're admitting girls and we are about 30 among 400 boys.

I am the only girl in my Maths and Physics classes; there's another girl with me in Chemistry.

When I first came here (after studying in Italy) I was very far behind, especially in Maths. I remember coming out of lessons feeling completely lost and crying. All my "silly" questions were a good joke for the others. In chemistry every single thing the other girl and I did wrong, was noticed and laughed at, even if a boy made the same mistake. Of course,

the masters ignored this completely.

I struggled hard in my first year to catch up on all the work and as they realised that I wasn't just 'a dumb female' they became even more suspicious of me. Even now after two years I just don't belong to my classes, or for that matter to the school. I don't think the school is ready for girls yet and certainly the boys have seen it as a threat to the male-dominated subjects.

For most girls it is still such a struggle to be recognised as having equal (if not better, at times) abilities with boys.
Yours sincerely,
Lesley Horsley
Dublin.

Wide-ranging Workshops★

Dear *Spare Rib*,
I am currently associated with the Women's Free Art Alliance. I have just read your coverage of the WFAA's activities and was personally a little disappointed that a more comprehensive review was not provided of the range of workshop activities provided by Women's School. I am registered with two of the three literary workshops; *Diary Workshop* using the diary notebook or journal as a source of personal and artistic expression and writing fiction and getting it published. The third is a poetry workshop. The role and function of these groups is particularly important since I think it is difficult for a 'beginning' writer to approach or find collective support for her efforts in the more established writers' groups.
Yours in sisterhood
Kay Stirling
London NW11

We should have mentioned that the WFAA are also running courses on African Drumming, Anthropology, Architecture, Astrology, Centering and Movement, Co-counselling, Karate, Kathakali, Life Drawing, Painting and Associated Media, Photography, Pottery, Theatre, Video, Watercolours, Weaving, and Women in the System, at 10 Cambridge Terrace Mews, London NW1 (tel 01-935 1841).

Split Demand

Dear *Spare Rib*,
A group of us in Lancaster were really amazed to read that a planning meeting has been arranged to talk about ways of campaigning around the second half of the sixth demand (SR 48). It brought up a lot of questions about heterosexual bias which are important to talk about in the WLM. Since when has the sixth demand been in two parts?

What justification is there for concentrating solely 'on the right of all women to define their own sexuality' and ignoring the original basis and impetus of that demand: an end to discrimination towards lesbians. Is everything meant to be OK if you're a lesbian or are we no longer a part of the women's movement?
Lancaster Women's Centre

Maybe it was a mistake to split the demand but we're sure it was no-one's intention to go against the spirit of it. The meeting you refer to (and that way of describing it) grew out of a Sexuality Workshop at the Newcastle Conference. People felt it was important to continue discussions on many aspects of sexuality including lesbian sexuality. (In fact almost all the women at the Spare Rib meeting were gay.) Far from 'ignoring the impetus' of the sixth demand, we felt that for women — gay and straight — to discuss more fully the sexual politics involved in defining our own sexuality could only strengthen the entire demand.

Lovemaking between Women

Dear *Spare Rib*,
As a gay woman and a feminist I have often been disappointed by *Spare Rib*'s failure to show the important role of lesbians and bisexual women within the WLM. By rejecting the male-defined concept of female sexuality (i.e. that every woman needs a man) we threaten the sexist ideology which forms the basis of women's oppression.

It is all the more disturbing therefore to note that in your article "Making Changes Making Love" the only form of sexuality mentioned is heterosexuality; there is continual reference to the couple without qualifying it as heterosexual and the general aim seems to be just to give the nice middle-class feminist a few tips on how to educate her man in bed!

You talk about the "need to challenge the myths and models which have dictated how we should be". Yet you fail to challenge the myth that heterosexuality is the only natural, valid form of sexual expression. You discuss "alternatives" such as oral sex, but make no specific mention of lovemaking between women nor of the opportunities this offers for building an equal, loving relationship. Such an omission not only alienates gay women but it reinforces the prejudices of straight women who can happily go on believing that lesbianism is of no concern to them. If women find it so difficult to relate to men on an equal basis,

as your article suggests, we should be pointing out the alternatives.

Yours in sisterhood
Poppy Rice
Hull

Eleanor replies: I'm very sorry that you interpreted what I wrote in this way, and wish that I had stated more strongly what had seemed to me to be apparent: that in this article (unlike the previous two — SR 42 & 44 — which deliberately did not distinguish between heterosexual and homosexual sexuality) I was specifically dealing with the problems involved in heterosexual sexuality, particularly pointing out the sexism built-in to our traditional models of heterosexual intercourse. Of course some of these problems, like the difficulty in communicating what we know about ourselves sexually to another person, are equally relevant to homosexual relationships.

I do not agree with you that I should have presented lesbian lovemaking as an "alternative" solution to these difficulties. To do so would seem to me to be a negative approach and to devalue the seriousness of a woman's decision to enter into a sexual relationship with another woman. (Equally I would never suggest that a woman confronting problems in a homosexual relationship should try heterosexuality as an alternative.) I certainly agree that we need much more written about the joys and struggles of living and loving with women but I do not think that article was the place to do it. I'm really sorry that you saw this as prejudice on my part.

As for your comment, "the general aim seems to me to give the nice middle-class feminist a few tips on how to educate her man in bed", I think you must have overlooked the end of the article where I stressed the importance of linking the efforts of individuals to take more control over their sexuality to a wider political struggle to change the sexist basis of this society. And I assure you that your derisory description in no way does justice to those many women who are seriously confronting these issues and finding that their implications extend to every part of their lives.

Not a Hopeless Dream

Dear *Spare Rib*,
I found your birthday issue very interesting, particularly the article "Making Changes Making Love". I am in my mid-50s and have been married for over 30 years. Until a few years ago I was not even aware that women had orgasms since, like so

many others, I never have. Recently, my husband and I have been hearing a lot about the clitoris and vibrators and it is all very thought-provoking; we are both very keen to know whether this could be of help to me. We would like to enjoy our sexual relationship more and your article seems to suggest that this is not a hopeless dream.
Sincerely
Y.M.
Herts

Eleanor has sent you more information about the work of the pre-orgasm groups. We thought it would interest other women in your situation to know that in America, where this work is more established, older women in their 50s and 60s attend these workshops and find them valuable.

Hera-worship?

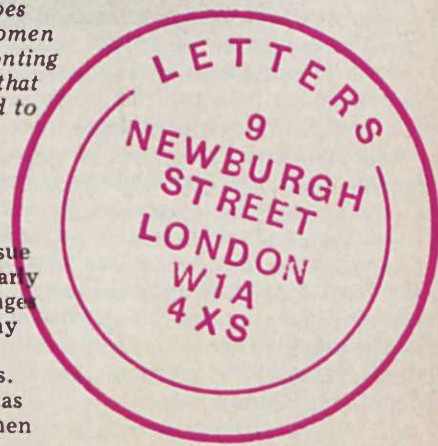
Dear *Spare Rib*,
Is Simone de Beauvoir now compiling this page? This seems like the only explanation for the facsimile of her signature that we were treated to in your last issue. Her notelet to *Spare Rib* surely didn't warrant being distinguished from other somewhat fuller correspondence.

Beware! Hera-worship can catch you with your ideologies down.

In sisterhood
B. Charles
London

It's a fair cop, we'll come clean. Last month's letter page compiler has been nursing a lifelong love for Ms. de Beauvoir. She wanted to treat the readers to the entire handwritten letter in the original French (honestly) but we managed to restrain her. But we really do agree that this sort of thing must be stamped out at all costs.

★ Indicates that the letter has been cut for space reasons.



OUT OF THE CLOSET INTO THE COURTS

Eleanor Stephens reports on discrimination against lesbian mothers in custody battles.

There have always been children brought up by parents who are homosexual, but until recently their homosexuality has been a closely guarded secret. More and more women are now choosing to live openly as lesbians in relationships with their lovers, and if they have children they are also asserting their right to be lesbians and mothers. It is a risk anyway to come out as a homosexual and because of prejudice in the law involving custody of children, lesbian mothers are finding that the risk involves losing their children.

When a woman who is a lesbian is unlucky enough to have to go to court to fight for custody she has at the moment no chance of winning. The judge always awards custody to the father. The most the mother can hope for is "access" — the right to visit the children who have lived with her from birth and often for long periods since separating from her husband. (Recently in America cases have been won, usually on appeal.)

The assumption of the courts and the judges, who alone make this decision, is that a lesbian cannot by definition be a good mother, so it must always be in the interests of the children to live apart from her. Normally in "tug-of-love" cases the courts would give custody to the mother since child care is assumed to be the woman's role. The husband may participate in major decisions, contribute financially and have access at weekends and holidays. The judge will only separate children from their mother if there are over-riding factors like the mother's health, or actual neglect or cruelty. Such considerations are obviously relevant to the children's welfare.

The mother's sexual orientation is taken to be just such a factor, and no other evidence has to be produced to disqualify her from bringing up her children. One judge, considered to hold relatively liberal views, went to some lengths to explain that while he did not attribute blame to the mother for her lesbianism, and could even go so far as to sympathise with her, it was vital that the court distinguish between understanding and approval. To approve of homosexuality, he said, would mean the decay of society as we know it and could only corrupt others.

A lesbian with openly feminist ideas poses a double threat. She is seen as a



direct challenge to family life and the traditional sexual roles which the courts uphold. A head-on political clash takes place with all the power on one side. (A few cases have been lost by women only because of their feminist involvement, without the added stigma of lesbianism.)

In one of the early cases, much was made of the mother having subversive feminist literature in her home — magazines like *Spare Rib* and *Shrew* were used as evidence against her — and she was accused of exposing her children to "an exotic atmosphere in which intellectual opinions expressing themselves as an eagerness for total feminine freedom, sexual and otherwise, will have a marked influence". The judge declared that her "passionate interest in the women's liberation movement" was likely to mean that her daughters would grow up with "little or no respect for the ordinary obligations of family life" and "be exposed to propaganda about sexual morality which could expose them to quite extraordinary risks in adolescence". Having painted this picture of life in what he described as an unhealthy "milieu of feminine fanaticism" he then felt quite justified in "protecting" the children involved by separating them from their mother.

The fact of women living together and raising children without men poses the most extraordinary threat to these guardians of the status quo. The court functions like a male club whose aging members wield absolute power over people's lives and who automatically sympathise with the husband. An American judge spelt this out only too well: "It is difficult to conceive of a more grievous indignity to which a person of normal psychological and sexual constitution could be exposed than the entry by his spouse upon an active and continuous course of homosexual love with another. Added to the insult of sexual loyalty per se (which is present in ordinary adultery) is the natural revulsion arising from the knowledge of the fact that the spouse's betrayal takes the form of a perversion¹.

Common sense and modern psychiatric knowledge concur as to the incompatibility of homosexuality and the subsistence of marriage between one so afflicted and a normal person."

Some judges may pay lip service to more liberal views, but these are the kind of attitudes underlying courtroom debate. The choice is seen to lie between the stigmatised, afflicted deviant, and the "normal" husband who presents the very picture of decent, solid virtues, often with new wife and mother-substitute in tow. The verdict comes as no surprise.

But the courtroom is not just a theatre of the absurd. It has terrible implications for the women and children concerned. Gillian, who has no chance at all of winning custody, said to me: "If I had known when I left my husband how it would turn out with my children, I sometimes wonder if I would have gone through with it." None of the women I spoke with regretted making this change but they all questioned that they should pay so high a price for their right to live and love as they choose.

Sue lives with her five-year-old son John and her lover Mary in the West Country. They have been living together for two years since Sue left her husband. Their home would appear to be everything a court could ask for, an idyllic place to raise a young child; they have many acres of woodland with streams running through, and have lots of friends and relatives, so John has plenty of contact with people of both sexes.

When Sue, after five years of marriage, told her husband about her relationship with Mary, he explained that he had been having a long-term affair which Sue knew nothing about, and asked that John live with him and his girlfriend. Sue agreed because she knew she had little chance of winning a contested custody case. But very soon the girlfriend left and John's father couldn't cope without female help, so he returned John to his mother. This to-ing and fro-ing happened again, and Sue decided it was best for John to make his home with her and Mary.

"John's father agreed with him living

1. *The law does not define a homosexual relationship during marriage as adultery. It is considered "unreasonable conduct".*

The courts assume that a lesbian by definition cannot be a good mother.

with us, and relations between us were quite friendly to begin with; I made sure John saw his father regularly. Then I had the impression that he got worried and rushed around to find a new woman. He found someone very competent and impressive whom he married two days after our divorce. Once she appeared on the scene, it was obvious they would fight to take John away, and everything became very strained and unpleasant. We first went to court last year. The judge said he didn't like tug-of-love cases and sent us outside to work it out. To our surprise the two barristers agreed to keep the status quo and leave John, who was only just four, with us. That's why it's all the more infuriating to lose now."

Sue went to court last month with what looked to be a very strong case. She had an excellent team of feminist lawyers and very good reports from welfare workers, psychiatrists, character witnesses and all the rest. The very young age of the child made it less likely that he would be removed from his mother. Against this was the fact that the father offered a mother-substitute in a heterosexual family with the possibility of new brothers and sisters. While the judge allowed that all four contenders were "attractive personalities" he approved particularly of the new wife. "She is the only adult without psychiatric blemish." (The judge even reprimanded Sue for not having made friends with this fine woman who was trying to take her child away! Incidentally, Sue and Mary's only "psychiatric blemish" was their homosexuality.)

The judge granted that there was little to choose between the two homes, and that John had an excellent relationship with his mother, so the judgement was based on the "problem" of the mother's sexual orientation. Both parties produced psychiatric reports on the possible effects of a child brought up in a lesbian household and the judge chose to accept the negative conclusions of the husband's witness, a psychiatrist who wrote: "John's mother practises statistically abnormal sexual acts which can be looked upon either as a deviation from normal or frankly perverted. I have no evidence before me to state that this environment will not affect John's future emotional and psycho-



sexual development. In the absence of a father or father-figure, male identification is not possible unless a substitute father is provided and this, within the setting of a homosexual environment, would not be satisfactory. The only person or persons John would be able to identify with would be his mother and her cohabitee and sooner or later he must learn that they engage in unnatural acts. It would be difficult to imagine that this young boy could go through his adolescent period of development without feeling shame and embarrassment, of having a mother who has elected to engage in sexual practices which are statistically abnormal. I think it would be agreed by a large body of practising clinical psychiatrists that persons who engage in homosexual patterns of behaviour have personality difficulties."

Most of these assertions are just that — unfounded assertions — but they carried weight in court rather than the report from the mother's psychiatrist which was much more moderate and emphasised the quality of the mother-child relationship. (As Sue said afterwards, do they think John is going to grow up to be a statistician?!)

Unfortunately there is no documentation on children raised in homosexual families so there is nothing with which to counter the traditional prejudices on their own terms. Sue thought this could have made a difference in her case: "We desperately need some research on all this. If we could have said in court, 'Look, here is a study of fifty children who've grown up with lesbian mothers and they're no different from other kids' (heterosexual, whatever, since we have to fight this on their terms at present) I believe this would have had a tremendous effect. It would undermine some of the statements they make which are based on nothing but prejudice and ridiculous myths about homosexuals. We also need people who've been brought up by homosexual parents to come out and say so. Our judge ended his summing up, 'These are uncharted waters which

I'm not prepared to sail on.' Instead he chooses to remove a young child from the home where he's happy and place him in a new situation. We have to have these waters seen to be charted, that's a priority."

By the time you read this, John will have left his mother's home and been moved to his father. Sue is allowed access once a fortnight and part of school holidays, although the ex-husband said in court that he may not be able to afford his half of the travel expenses for John to visit his mother. The judge insisted that John be "protected from the lesbian relationship" and that when he visits, the two women must sleep apart and be "just friends". Such an invasion of privacy is quite common; a couple who, out of fear of losing what little they had, followed this injunction found that the children were upset by the change. They assumed their mother and lover had quarrelled and that something was wrong for them to be more distant.

After the judgement, Sue wrote: "I really do not know how to find words to express my reaction to this delicate queer-bashing. Anyone would think that the sexual aspect of our relationship is the be-all and end-all. I love John and can't envisage life without him but it seems that at the moment there is nothing we can do; we have been advised that it would be pointless to appeal. I suppose we have paid the price for our love and we are both very sore at the cost. We shall never lose these battle scars completely and the judgement will stick in our throats every time we try to swallow it — like trying to swallow a whole ostrich egg. If we can fight to make things different for other people in the future we shall do so. And we certainly do not intend to be ostriches."

The obsession with the mother's sexuality is striking in many cases and the husband may dwell on details designed to reinforce the court's phobia of lesbianism. One man, for instance, described how he had found marks on the pillows of his wife's double bed showing they had been depressed by two heads! The courts apply a double standard to the question of the lesbian couple showing any physical affection to each other with children around: in a heterosexual relationship this is

"I was accused of everything except turning people into frogs!" mother after losing custody

thought to be good for the children by contributing to a loving, secure atmosphere, but it is considered detrimental — almost obscene — in a homosexual relationship.

The myth of lesbians as child molesters is often in evidence and the courts may ask the mother how she will manage if her women friends make sexual advances to her daughters. It is hard to believe that the judge would voice his concern about a woman's new husband seducing her daughter — though it is far more likely to happen.

As Sue's case showed, the new wife, although often a complete stranger to the children, plays an important part in strengthening her husband's claim for custody, particularly if she has children herself. His lawyers paint her as the picture of respectability and draw maximum contrast between her and the 'deviant' mother. One such woman who made an excellent impression on the judge, exploited her conventionality to the full: "I'm really just a Marks and Sparks sort of person," was how she described herself in court.

Although the custody battle is assumed to be between the mother and the father who both wish to bring up the children, once the father has custody he often plays a minimal part in their daily lives. If he has not remarried, the children may be cared for by relatives or a succession of housekeepers. A woman who has lost custody told me that one of the saddest things was the fact that her children had been looked after by ten au pairs in fifteen months. By taking the children away from their mother, the court may be depriving them of any close parental relationship whatsoever.

Gillian is unable even to get regular access to see her two young children. She has no chance at all of custody. During the last two years since she left her husband and children, there have been a succession of court orders for access which her husband consistently obstructs. From the moment she told him about her feelings for Jane, who was also married with a young child, his attitude has been vindictive and punitive using the children as weapons. He immediately gave her an ultimatum to leave ("I don't want my children touched by a lesbian") or to stop seeing Jane, give up her job and never go out without him. Under this pressure she



and Jane decided to leave for London straight away. "Looking back, we should have taken the kids with us. I would advise women to do that if they possibly can — but how could we? We were both under incredible strain, set off at once and slept the first nights in the car. We knew no-one in London — we even went to sex shops in Soho to find out about gay organisations!"

Jane's husband was already having an affair with a woman who he later married and he has been relatively cooperative about their child. She goes up to see her every fortnight and the child comes to stay with them in the holidays.

Gillian had hoped for a similar arrangement with her husband but she has had to fight all the way. "My case was badly mishandled by my solicitors, who didn't bother to go for custody at the time of the divorce. It's very important to do this or later it's used as evidence that you didn't care about your children. Now it's a struggle just to see them at all. My daughter, who I was very close to, has been turned against me by her father and says now that she doesn't want to see me. He's told her I'm abnormal and don't want to be her mother. Once I managed to talk to her on the phone while he was out. He punished me for this by not bringing the children to meet me after I'd driven a long way to see them. He has become completely vindictive, while maintaining that he's trying to protect the children from being contaminated by me. When you remember that two years ago, Jane and I spent all our time together with the children, we even had plans to go on holiday together; now I can't even see them without a chaperone! I think he's hoping that if he makes life hard enough we'll give up. But we won't, we'll fight it to the House of Lords if necessary."

Of course many women never do fight their cases because they know they have no chance of winning, so these injustices remain invisible. The cases that have come to court reveal a phobia not just of lesbianism but of non-conformity in general: people who deviate from

society's ideas of what is normal are penalised. They show a striking resemblance to American custody cases involving inter-racial marriages — the non-white, minority group parent loses custody.

Time and again fears that the children will grow up homosexual and be influenced in its favour, and that the social stigma against homosexuality will harm the child, are taken as facts to be used as evidence. One American judge of the Pennsylvanian Supreme Court did try to counter these biases, but he is an exception: "If the children are raised in a happy and stable home, they will be able to cope with prejudice and hopefully learn that people are unique individuals who should be treated as such." Perhaps this can give us some hope for English court decisions, though at the moment it seems to me that the backlash of intolerance which is growing in the present crisis makes the outlook grim.

Homosexuality is not a crime, a sin or a disease; it need not even be a problem if society did not make it so for many. What is meant to be at issue in a custody case (and I believe the entire custody system needs to be challenged) is the interest and well-being of the children, something the recent Children's Act emphasised. So the crucial factor is what the person is like as a parent. Neither heterosexuality nor homosexuality are in themselves guarantees of good parenthood; how the parent defines herself (or himself), her religion, politics, lifestyle or sexual preference is irrelevant. If the court is to question someone's "fitness" to be a parent it must be on grounds that would apply to anyone — lesbian or heterosexual, black muslim or macrobiotic.

A pressure group, Action for Lesbian Parents (ALP), is working to publicise this injustice in the legal system and to promote research on children growing up in homosexual families. It is crucial that all of us who feel strongly about this blatant anti-woman prejudice make our voices heard. We urge you to contact ALP c/o Spare Rib if you can help in any way. □

Minor details have been changed in this article to preserve anonymity. Court quotes are from notes written in court, not from official transcripts.

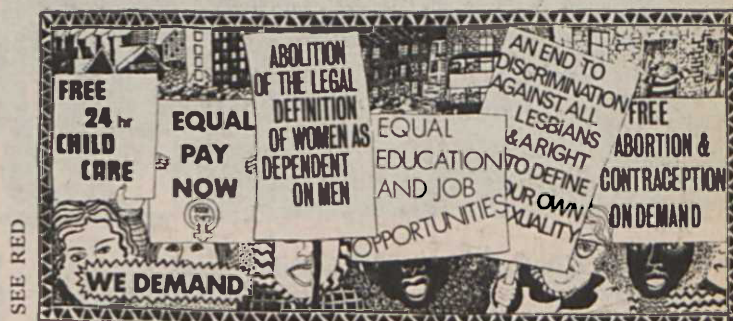
STICK 'EM UP

Posters can be used for many purposes: agitational, decorative or educative. Feminist posters don't have much of an agitational role at the moment — for example, there has not been much fly posting yet. It's expensive — a large number of posters is needed and costs can't be recouped — and it's hazardous. So women's posters are used as personal declarations of feminism at home, in women's centres or at meetings.

Poster making was formerly left to "experts" and "poster artists". Today, with cheap, widely publicised techniques, anyone can try their hand at it. And because posters can be mass produced they don't carry the same scarcity value as paintings, can't provide fodder for the investment market, and remain available to everyone.

However, as posters are out there fighting for attention, instead of hanging in galleries waiting to be contemplated, they make specific demands on their makers. For example, a long drawn out message and a busy image would be pointless on a political fly poster which people flash past on a bus. And an educational poster which condensed a complex idea into a single punchy phrase would defeat its own ends. While a message expressed in jargon familiar to only a small minority wouldn't spread far.

Feminist poster makers face these and other demands. They are trying to create inspiring, alternative images of women to the ones that surround us without making new stereotypes for us to live up to. But to show us as we are in this society can sometimes be more infuriating and depressing than inspiring, and many poster makers avoid incorporating an image of a woman into their work.



The diversity among the posters reflects the diversity of the women's movement in Britain. Some are made by individuals who have decided that their particular idea is worthy of a poster to publicise feminist views, and others are made by poster collectives. Some are humorous and others are sharply demanding, such as the See Red Collective's or the posters put out by the National Abortion Campaign. ▶

In a future issue we'll be describing a simple method of making posters. If we've left out your poster, let us know.

arts

A GUIDE TO WOMEN'S POSTERS

Compiled by Deirdre Armstrong



NOT THE CHURCH AND NOT THE STATE



PHOTOS BY ANDREW ROCHFORD



Top L: Elizabeth Moore
Top R: Red Dragon
Bottom L: Monica Sjöo
Centre: Pen Dalton
Bottom R: Sharon & Dee



● **Wages for Housework Committee**

Wages for Housework Centre,
128 Drummond Street, London
NW1 Tel: 01-387 3550/459
1150

("None so fit to break the
chains as those who wear them")
35p, "Wages for housework"
20p, "Statue of Liberty" 60p)

● **Women's Liberation Workshop**

38 Earlham Street, London
WC1 Tel: 01-836 6081

Have a selection of posters by
different people including
some American ones.

● **London Working**

Women's Charter Group
114 Hampton Road, London
E7 Tel: 01-534 1640

They will be reprinting their
charter poster.

● **Lezzo Posters**

80 Lancaster Road, London
W11

("Rape" 30p — see *Spare Rib*
47, p22, "The women's army
is marching" 30p, "Our Rose"
— Rose Dugdale, 40p, "Ulrike
Meinhof" 40p)

● **Red Dragon Collective**

c/o Alison, N London Poly
Students Union, Holloway
Road, London N7
(Abortion poster — "Not the
church and not the state" 30p)

● **Tolmer's Poster**

Collective
20 Tolmer's Square, London
N1

("We are 40% of the work-
force" 40p — part of a series of
six posters to be produced on
women and work)

● **Lesbian Posters**

Sharon & Dee, 26a Eaton
Street, Norwich

("We refuse to support the
male capitalist oppression"
25p, "The lesbian spirit is
beauty within every woman"
15p, "The female image pre-
sented by the sexist media will
be smashed by us the women"
15p)

● **Women in Print**

● **See Red**

16a Ilisse Yard (off Crampton
Street), London SE17. Tel:
01-701 8314

A series of screen prints
between 15p and 20p ("Fight
the cuts", "A woman's work is
never done", "Women unite",
"Capitalism also depends on
domestic labour", "Anti-
advertising poster"). The col-
lective also does exhibition
posters, clippings, etc., to make
background for meetings.

● **Gay Posters**

'Posters', 15a Railton Road,
London SE24

("The ideal couple" 40p,
"Learning to be a man" 40p)



EQUAL PAY NOW
 EQUAL EDUCATION &
 JOB OPPORTUNITY
 FREE TWENTY FOUR
 HOUR CHILD CARE
 FREE CONTRACEPTION &
 ABORTION ON DEMAND
 LEGAL & FINANCIAL
 INDEPENDENCE
 FOR ALL WOMEN
 AN END TO DISCRIMINATION
 AGAINST LESBIANS
 & THE RIGHT OF WOMEN TO A
 SELF DEFINED SEXUALITY



Top L: Wages for
 Housework Committee
 Centre: Women's
 Liberation Workshop
 Top R: Gay Posters
 Bottom L: Tolmer's
 Poster Collective
 Bottom R: See Red



● **Kid's Book Group**
 Flat 3, 36 Lady Margaret Road,
 London NW5
 "Some people have one job/
 Some people have two jobs"
 70p — see *Spare Rib*
 42, p43

● **Revolution Workshop**
 Bertha Husband & Jules Moore,
 31 Edward Street, Abingdon,
 Oxford
 Range of feminist screen
 prints on abortion, cuts, etc.

● **Islington Women's
 Poster Collective**
 Adrienne/Anne, Old Fire
 Station, Mayton Street, London
 N7
 Not many at the moment, will
 perhaps produce some soon

● **Grass Roots**
 61 Golborne Road, London
 W10
 ("Angela Davis" 35p)

● **Anti-Apartheid
 Movement**
 89 Charlotte Street, London
 W1
 ("Women under apartheid",
 10p, "The wound of the
 daughter of my people wounds
 me too", 10p, Namibia poster)

● **Monica Sjo**
 Women's Liberation Workshop,
 38 Earlham Street, London
 WC1 and Compendium, 234
 Camden High Street, London
 NW1
 Both the above stock her
 posters ("God giving birth"
 30p, "Miraculous love" 50p)

● **Pen Dalton**
 767 Apt. 11 Cypress Walk,
 Goleta, California 93017, USA
 Though now living in the USA,
 she can get posters sent to you
 from her stocks in England.
 ("Women unite" 30p, "Women's
 Liberation is the revolution"
 30p, "It's a woman's privilege
 to change his mind" 30p, "We
 are the women men have
 warned us about" 40p)

● **Monica Ross**
 Flat 2, 20 Valentine Road,
 Kings Heath, Birmingham 14
 (Anti-sexist advertising poster
 10p, also some posters for
 feminist events, etc., produced
 at Birmingham Women's Centre,
 76 Brighton Road, Balsall
 Heath, Birmingham 12)

● **Elizabeth Moore**
 96 Fellows Road, London NW3
 Tel: 01-722 0223
 ("Some of my best friends are
 men... Yes, but would you
 let your sister marry one?" £1)

● **For people interested
 in forming a poster making
 group — Anne Grove-White has
 done a course in printing and
 would like to work on posters/
 leaflets — perhaps starting a
 group in September.**
 c/o Bite Theatre Group, 73
 South Hill Park, London NW3

● **All these posters are avail-
 able from Compendium, 234
 Camden High Street, London
 NW1. No mail order. For
 details of mail order, write to
 individual poster makers.**

Poor Artist

I am coming to the end of my first year on a three year Fine Art course at Kingston. My local Education Authority is Richmond, who refused to give me any money towards my training. They say that I have already had one grant (Teacher Training 1963/6) and a grant for this second course is discretionary and they don't want to know. I have already paid the fees for the first two years, and my husband has helped. But I have not got enough to live on and next year's fees will be £212. I am getting depressed about finding the money, as no doubt the final year will cost more. I have of course to pay for all my materials and these increase in cost all the time.

Do you or any of your readers know of any organisations or foundations, etc., who might help a struggling 32-year-old painter. Even a letter or two from people in a similar position would be welcome.

Love

Helen Madenan
4 Chesham Court, Anlaby Road, Teddington,
Middx.

*I am not sure that I can help you much on this. Because you have already done a degree course, your LEA does have the right to refuse you a grant. Have you tried going to put your case directly to the grant assessors; often personal contact works better than just filling in forms. Sometimes LEAs can be persuaded to change their minds if a sympathetic college principal or admission officer presses a student's case.

However, if this doesn't work, there are a number of charities which might help. See Educational Charities published by the NUS, 3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1 0DU, 15p. In particular try writing to The Society for the Promotion of Training of Women, Court Farm, Hedgeley, Bucks.

Adoption

Can you help me with information of a fringe organisation that I can contact regarding the foster/adoption of children.

My position is: single female, giving up work in a months time to live in a farmhouse with 1½ acres of ground situated in Cornwall, which I own. I feel that I have the time and space to give a couple of children that might otherwise live in an institution a rewarding existence.

Yours faithfully
Ms V Hamnell, Uxbridge

*I am afraid that there is no such thing as a fringe organisation for adoption or fostering. You have to go through your local council or a registered adoption agency. You can also do it by a third party arrangement, through your doctor or social worker for example, but I am told that this method is the most likely to create problems. You can get a list of adoption agencies from the Association of British Adoption Agencies, 4 Southampton Row, London WC1 (01-242 8951). The Adoption Resource Exchange, 39 Brixton Road, London SW9, deals with the adoption of children with special needs.

Adoption is still unfortunately a rather long business, often involving quite a lot of struggle, and certainly tends to favour reasonably well off, white, middle class couples. But this is often due to the fact that such homes can provide a good material environment for adoption rather than a deliberate policy against working class families.

For further information see Women's Rights: A Practical Guide by Anna Coote and Tess Gill (Penguin), and How to Adopt, a Consumers' Association publication from 14 Buckingham Street, London WC2 (01-839 1222).

Equal Pay

One of the earliest cases to go to our local Industrial Tribunal under the Equal Pay Act this year was that of eight women who lost on the grounds of 'material difference' which was that the men traditionally had been paid according to staff status and they had not. The judge said that this anomaly would disappear in time and that after employers had been given five years to make changes.

The Brighton Women's Rights Action group urged them to appeal. Frustration, management bullying, ill health and being in debt prevented them from doing so.

But the Equal Opportunities Commission has encouraged the women to apply to the High Court for leave to appeal out of time. This would be very important to clarify the law and create a precedent for future cases. A barrister will be needed and this all takes money; legal aid takes a married woman's husband's income into account.

We have set up a fighting fund to deal with this and future cases. Please give us your full support and send as much as you can to Chris, 76 Balsdean Road, Woodingdean, Brighton, Box 2 6PF.

Love
Chris

Sex Roles in Children's Literature

I am a student at teacher training college. I am hoping to do my special essay for education on sex roles as portrayed in children's literature. I wonder if you could send me any information in connection with this.

Thanks

Helen Telfer

Clifton, Bristol

*At the end of this month the Children's Rights Workshop are producing the second in their series called Papers on Children's Literature published by the Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative. It's called Sexism in Children's Books: Facts, Figures and Guidelines, and is a compilation of the best American and British writing on the subject. It'll be available either from bookshops or by post from the Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 14 Talacre Road, London NW5, price 60p plus 10p postage.

Vaginal Discharge

I am going through the not unusual procedure of being treated by a special clinic for an unknown discharge. So far they have been unsuccessful.

I do seem to remember some time ago seeing an article in your magazine about the problems of vaginal infections and I am wondering if there are alternatives that I can try, or whether you can put me in touch with anybody who might be more likely to help than your average venereologist.

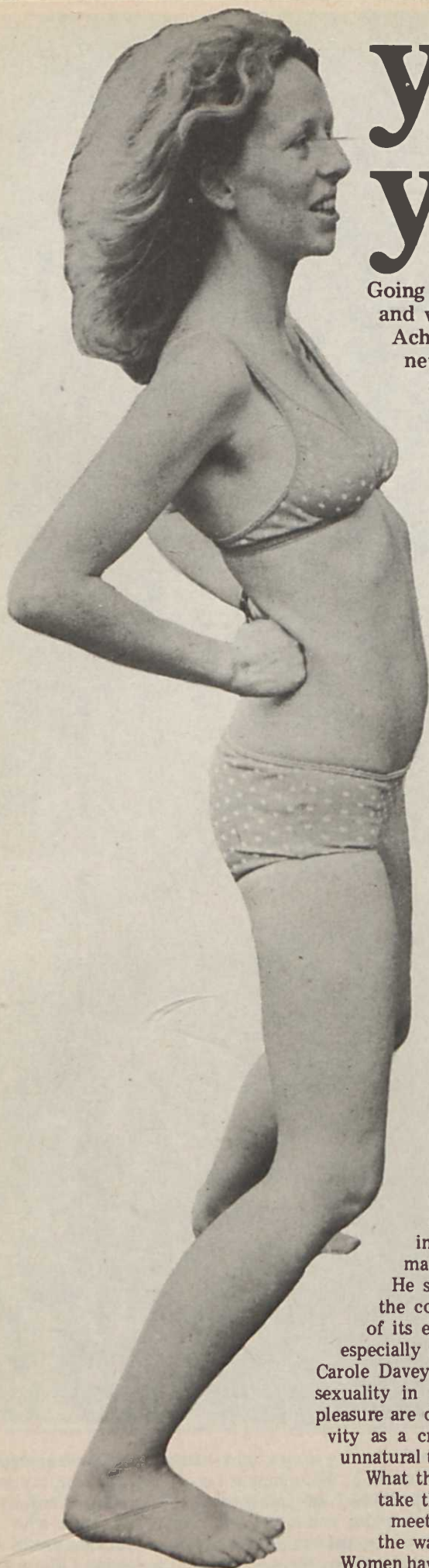
Thanks a lot,

Elaine

London SW11

*The Essex Road Women's Health Group have a clinic on Mondays from 3-6.30. They also publish a leaflet which describes different discharges and ways in which you can deal with them yourself: like yoghurt for thrush, for example.

See also Our Bodies Ourselves by the Boston Women's Health Collective, and a book called Vaginal Health by Carol V. Horis. Both are obtainable from Compendium, 240 Camden High Street, London NW1. Essex Road Women's Group is at 108 Essex Road, London N1. 01-226 9936.



your body, your self

Going to a bioenergetics group for the first time can be a very strong and weird experience. Your overall sense of your body may change. Aches and stiffnesses you had may have gone, perhaps replaced by new ones. The exercises may have released strong feelings like anger and fear. You may have felt sick or hot. Or else you may not have felt all that much at the time, but may notice some changes later on.

Like most forms of therapy, apart from the use of drugs or ECT, bioenergetics aims to release repressed emotions. However, it differs from other forms — psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, primal scream, most gestalt therapy — in that it achieves this by working directly with the body. In the following interview, Carole Davey, who runs movement and bioenergetic groups for women at Community, explains how this happens. But first, some background about bioenergetics.

The originator of both the theory and the therapy was Wilhelm Reich. There are now several different schools of bioenergetics, mostly in the USA but also in Scandinavia and Britain. Reich, who trained with Freud, first developed his ideas in response to the slow pace of psychoanalysis in effecting any change. He noticed how different people had typical ways of moving, holding and expressing themselves, and how these bodily postures and gestures related to their emotional patterns. Reich broke the analytic taboo about touch, for which he has never been forgiven, and tried a more direct form of therapy. He found that by getting his patients to breathe more freely, and by loosening specific muscular rigidities with pressure, very strong emotions and repressed memories were provoked. This was a much more powerful way of breaking through a patient's resistance than simply talking with no face-to-face contact, as in psychoanalysis. Reich, however, continued to use verbal methods of therapy as well, as do most bioenergetic therapists. The various schools of bioenergetics have elaborated Reich's basic insights, developing different forms of exercise, massage and posture to release feelings, and also, in the case of Lowen, an extensive typology of different character structures.

Reich saw pleasure and anxiety as opposed — the one being an expansion of the body outwards, the other a contraction inwards. He understood that few people in our society are able to let themselves experience very much pleasure. A lot of bioenergetics aims to increase people's capacity to tolerate their own pleasure, sexual or otherwise.

Bioenergetics, like the whole of Reich's work, is full of contradictions. Reich wrote a lot about the family and relationships between men and women that is still very relevant today. He had a very clear and important understanding of how sexual repression within the family maintained people's acceptance of and deference to authoritarian society. He saw how people were split internally and alienated from themselves by the conditions under which they lived. However, Reich's work has lost most of its explicit political content in the hands of subsequent therapists. This is especially true of the more clinically orientated therapy, rather than the kind that Carole Davey talks about. And even in his most radical writings, Reich wrote about sexuality in ways which are clearly male — his descriptions of orgasm and sexual pleasure are descriptions of male, not female, experience, and he saw vaginal receptivity as a criterion of female pleasure. He even saw homosexuality as something unnatural that wouldn't happen in a communist society.

What this means to me is that — as with Freud and with Marx — women have to take the important truths and methods of a theory, and develop it further to meet their own needs. With bioenergetics the importance for women lies in the way that women can reclaim their bodies, and with that their whole selves. Women have hardly begun to own or know their own bodies. It's not only a question of learning more of your own anatomy or physiology, though that is important. It's also a question of overcoming the ways we are out of touch with our needs, rather than those of male culture, the ways in which we are not alive to ourselves.

By Jo Ryan

your body, your self

Carole Davey, who runs movement and bio-energetic groups for women, talks to Alison Fell and Jo Ryan.

Carole: It was about four years ago that I first heard of an encounter group, it was a 48-hour marathon in someone's basement. It sounded like a theatre group that I used to be in in Australia — we would do lots of games and act different roles — and I liked the sound of it, so I went. For the first 12 hours I didn't understand what the hell they were doing. I was horrified. If anyone got into an emotional state I would laugh and have to hide my face with a cushion. People thought I was crying, and I was very uncomfortable with their misunderstanding and my own insincerity. Eventually I included myself in the group. Afterwards I was very sceptical about it, like — where do you go from here? — I did that but my life hasn't changed — those kind of questions.

★ How did you get into doing body work and bio-energetics?

Carole: That's very much to do with Nadine Scott [a group leader in the growth movement]. I did a 5-day group with her. The first day was a movement group, somehow a celebration of movement . . . running, stamping, jumping, squatting, moving different parts of you, breathing, expanding your body . . . experiencing yourself in many different ways.

★ How is this different from physical exercise?

Carole: With sport, there's no emotional link — there's pleasure and satisfaction at achieving — but the beautiful thing about bio-energetics is that there is an emotional link. Many of the positions are stress positions, coming from the premise that life is lived in stress. You focus on the stress by putting the body into those positions. You cannot help but make some connection with yourself through that.

★ Can you say what a stress position is? It's something to do with opening up the body, isn't it?

Carole: Right. As you live your life the body becomes contracted. There are various things that you take on, that are put on you from society, from everyone you have contact with — that make the impulses of the body become smaller, contract. And with that there is stress set up, there is tension because the body is under contraction. So if you put yourself in a stress position and you hold it, stay with it as long as you can, you go into the tension that the stress position is manifesting. At that point, with that, you usually connect with your pain, or maybe hopelessness or despair. If you go into the tightness of the held-down part, there is a release or catharsis, some kind of expansion out of it.

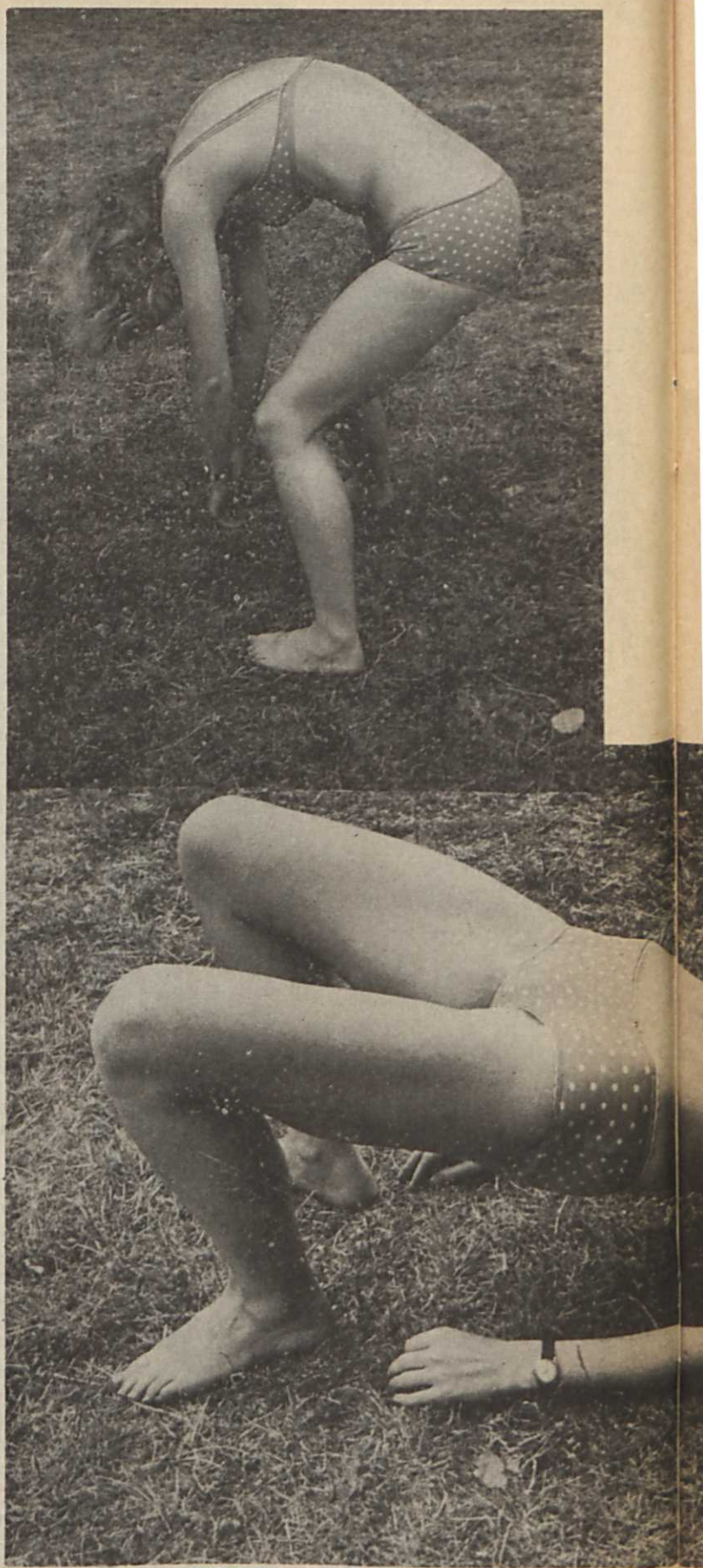
★ In the first movement groups, did you also use stress positions?

Carole: Yes, but we would also do lots of running, not just stationary stress positions, lots of moving out. In doing that I'd really meet my reluctance to move, my resistance to moving out, to somehow having more than I already had. The something more I see as related to pleasure, to a fuller potential, a fuller realisation. These are clichés in a way, but they do mean something to me.

Take it in terms of women. I have done a lot of mixed movement groups, but my pleasure is doing movement groups with women, I don't get the same kind of pleasure working with men. That's to do with the body, I'm unsure of my own sexuality and theirs, and I don't want to con the man into responding. I have to be fairly clear in myself in that way. But doing bio-energetics with women is for my own personal gain.

The women's movement is about protest, about frustration at your position as a woman. Bio-energetics allows that outrage to be expressed. Bio-energetics means body energy and energy is life. There is no limitation, you walk down the street, you breathe, you are doing things, working, having a sexual relationship with someone, you are using your body all the time. It's constantly there. That's why I've aligned myself with bio-energetics, rather than gestalt or encounter, although I do use those too.

Bio-energetics goes beyond the limit of an exercise, it's a constant experience. When I came into the room just now I felt



my chest tight, my throat tight — in terms of a bio-energetic analysis of me at that moment I could feel my fear, my anxiety. I could feel how I was trying to cope with it by sitting myself here and looking you in the eye. I can always know what's going on with me by just tuning into my body, but that means also connecting with my manner. OK, so I'm feeling a bit of tightness here, what's happening? What's going on, what's the threat, what's making me uptight? What am I unsure of and what can I do about it? Say it maybe — say "I'm feeling nervous". And then I feel

Right 1. A basic bioenergetic stress position that helps the flow of energy through the body to the ground, as well as opening up the body. If you hold this position, breathing in to the belly, and eyes open, you may begin to vibrate slightly, often in the legs. This signifies the flow of energy. You may also feel other sensations and emotions aroused by this energy flow — nausea, hotness, fear, sadness, for example. As well as allowing greater body mobility, this position shows you where your main blocks and tensions are.

Details of exactly how to position yourself can be found in the book by Lowen mentioned at the end of the article.

Left 2. The reverse position to no.1. This helps develop feeling in the legs and contact with the ground. It also loosens the breathing. You usually experience vibrations in the legs.

Bottom 3. This is a position that stretches the front thigh muscles and helps free the pelvis. Sometimes spontaneous pelvic movements develop. This position is often used with synchronised breathing and pelvic movements to release tension, and it often elicits very strong feelings. Details of the exercises and breathing can be found in the books mentioned.



a bit better, I don't have to hide it.

*** Do you find it difficult to sustain that degree of body awareness?**

Carole: It's a choice, often I don't want to know. If I am angry and frustrated, I can feel my jaw tighten and my shoulders come up. Maybe there's a voice telling me to do something about it, to come out with it, and I won't and then I have a terrible day. I'm just tight and mean and with-holding. The exercises are just a

beginning, they help you listen to yourself, focus down into your body. It's like finding yourself again, you see that there's a lot going on that you've been ignoring. It doesn't mean you have to be checking yourself out all the time. I can use it if I want to — if I'm into my self-abuse I won't.

There's an assumption that bio-energetics is just about the body — it's not. But there's a conflict between the head and the body. You've got the head in control of the body a lot of the time, so the body gets stopped, cut out. You're working on allowing the body impulse to emerge, so not to be out of touch with it — but not to go crazy with it either.

I can understand people's resistance to doing this. It's painful to reclaim yourself, because you can feel your denial at the same time, you feel how you sell yourself short.

*** What particular issues and body patterns come up in the women's groups, as opposed to mixed ones?**

Carole: I'd say there was a shyness amongst women when they are around men in terms of their friendship and love for other women. There's a risk for them that they may be seen as lesbian if they declare their fondness for another woman. When men are around it becomes polarised, the contact between women gets fragmented, it's a greater risk to be intimate with another woman.

Issues about strength and power and the ability to stand on your own two feet are always present. So if we start doing movement, women will feel their weakness very quickly. They haven't got the confidence that they can come forward, that they can come out, that that's allowable. Particularly with sexuality, the old idea is that the woman is passive and that the man does it to her. If a woman can put her energy out, if she can move forward, she's going to be much more fulfilled in a sexual situation than if she takes what is given. But the risk is that if she lets her own desire emerge it may be greater than the man's. The man may be afraid of that. I can say to myself that I don't want to offend the man, that I'm ashamed of the desire in myself, because it hasn't been validated anywhere. My mother, the books you read on sex, they don't say "Go ahead and take it for yourself, it's yours, you can come before the man." There's such a myth about orgasm. I really think that somebody else cannot give you an orgasm — you do it.

*** Did you learn that for yourself through doing bio-energetics?**

Carole: Yes. It was only about three years ago that I had my first orgasm and that was a lot to do with me accepting that it was alright to move, to let myself come forward. Somewhere I said to myself, I want more than what I'm getting, and too bad if the other person doesn't like it. It's still difficult, I don't come every time by any means, but the difference that has made to me, the feeling of being able to do that for myself...

*** That sounds like finding your power.**

Carole: Yes, and not using it to beat someone up, not to abuse it, but using it to take for myself. It feels so reassuring inside.

*** Do you work explicitly on issues about orgasm in the women's group?**

Carole: No, but it's always there in the group. Also, the focus of any group is usually on the unresolved issues affecting the leader. I'm still struggling with the issue of orgasm so I'm looking for it in the group, and so I usually find it. The same with using your strength and with feelings of loneliness, they are very live issues for me, even though I know lots of people.

*** Some women feel safer in women's groups and find that they can explore things that they couldn't do in a mixed group. How do you see that developing? I know for myself that I have to confront heterosexuality at some point.**

Carole: If I thought a woman was escaping by being in a women's group, if I thought from talking to her about her daily life that she really needed to come up against a man, then I might suggest she goes to a mixed group. I have had arguments with women that a women's group is not where it's at, that it's too safe, too protective, that women need to be with men. I see a women's group as a transition. I don't think women get stuck with it, the issues in the group are often about relationships, about how they

your body, your self

are being treated by men, how they are letting themselves be treated. There have been some feminist women who haven't liked the group, who haven't liked confronting another woman and facing the negativity and jealousy between women. They felt that to attack another woman wasn't to support her. It's very difficult to be honest about how you feel about another woman, to say what you see she's doing, what you don't like. It's scary, but I do believe that ultimately it's supportive too.

*** What kinds of things get projected onto you as a leader? Do people see you as a mother?**

Carole: No, not often, maybe because I'm not one, though I'd like to be. Often I'm seen as being very together, knowing it all, that everything's easy for me. I'm just related to as being a leader and that's very lonely. Sometimes the women see me as having sold myself out in setting up as a leader. They don't want to know my clay feet, my struggles, and that makes me sad. They want to see me as perfect — I'm not, I'm not perfect, I never will be, I don't even aspire to be. But they like to see me like that because then they can bounce off me.

Being a leader can be just a static role and that's a limitation, but it doesn't have to be, it can be very nourishing for me. When I'm most insecure, if someone is attacking me, I do go into the role, it's my way of protecting myself.

*** What about the limitations of bio-energetics? One of the drawbacks I found was that sometimes there was a confusion of powerful feelings from years back, but having felt a hint of them, I wasn't able to understand them or integrate them.**

Carole: Certainly in movement groups a lot is evoked that there may not be time to deal with — you may need further work to integrate things. You could have worked on being confused — when you say confused I think that in some way you're overwhelmed by the feelings. We could have talked about that, isolated and focussed one of the powerful feelings, and if you could have held onto it, then you could have seen the other feelings in relation to it.

*** What about people who've been severely disturbed and cut off for years? Does bio-energetics work for them?**

Carole: I've thought of doing bio-energetic work in mental hospitals. I've only been to one a few times but the thing that really struck me was that people need to move, they need to breathe — they're way out there somewhere over the hill, they're not with themselves any more. A friend of mine works in a hospital, he can't have big screaming sessions, but he does some elementary bio-energetics. It becomes very explosive because they get in touch with their feelings very quickly. In some ways that's what their state is about, going over the edge into their emotions, but then it's all controlled by drugs in the hope that it will all level itself out. The pace of working with people who are so disturbed has to be very, very slow. I have had people in weekend groups who have been very disturbed, and I've had to go very slowly, but they've felt something good from it — I've seen that happen. Schizophrenia is a state of the body being frozen, locked. The person is very stiff, there's no mobility, no movement of energy. For that person, bio-energetic therapy may take years and it's really hard work, but they will come through. Each movement has to be integrated, each moment checked out, because it is so easy for a person in that state to get into the whole spinning off into the void. □

Helpful reading: *The only way to learn about bio-energetics is to experience it, and it is better to do that before reading anything, preferably by going to a group of some kind. I would recommend Total Orgasm by Jack L. Rosenberg (Wildwood) as a sensitive introduction to the exercises and the toleration of pleasure. Books by Alexander Lowen, e.g. The Betrayal of the Body (Collier paperback), or Bioenergetics (Coward, McCann and Geoghan), contain some details of the exercises, and discuss the bodily expression of particular emotions and characters. Lowen is important for the ways in which he has developed Reichian therapy, but I find his more general observations about life and society quite offensive, and completely devoid of Reich's insights about the position of individuals within an oppressive society.*

WHAT EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW ABOUT VIBRATORS

As the first company to introduce vibrators into the U.K. and having sold some hundred of thousands, we feel that we know more about them and their use than most.

The most important thing to remember is, **that they do work** — providing the woman has no violent prejudice against the use of artificial sexual stimulation. Some women find the shape off-putting. The phallic symbolism, deliberately created by the makers to emphasize its sexual usage, gives them the impression that it is meant to be used as an artificial penis, and indeed it can and is so used. Some women, however, find the effect — when used in this way — to be more numbing than stimulating.

The vibrator is designed and is far more effective when used for clitoral stimulation and its undoubted value for this purpose has been well established by Masters and Johnson in their book "An Analysis of Human Sexual Response." In the book they describe how, using a similar device, they were able to bring to orgasm women who have never before reached a climax.

These were extreme cases obviously. Normally, the vibrator is used to provide extra stimulation during love making and is particularly useful where the woman's response tends to be slow. And, of course, it is just as often used purely for personal pleasure.

Finally a word about quality. There are many different makes on the market today, all of similar design, ranging in quality from very good to absolutely useless. We have been selling the same model for seven years and have enough confidence in it to offer you our special 'money refund' service if you are not satisfied.

If you want to experiment with your own personal vibrator, just complete the coupon below.

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NEWS

Police protect unequal pay

"I'm out and my old man's in. But it doesn't make much difference because there's not much being done there now that all the women are out.

"One thing it has proved is who does the work in this factory. The women do it all!"

Women at Trico's, an American-owned windscreen-wiper factory in Brentford, are still out (see *Spare Rib* 49). They've been on strike for equal pay since May 24, doing four hour shifts of picket duty day and night to cover the front and back gates to the factory.

They looked pretty settled there on the low walls or in folding chairs, making tea and talking, when we arrived one afternoon, offering support and asking for information. They'd had so many visitors — reporters from local, national and left papers, people willing to help with picketing, put on plays or sing for them — that we wondered if they were sick of it. "No," said a woman who'd been on duty every day since the strike began, "it passes time when people come."

Not all the 350 women on strike are actively involved in picketing. Many of those we spoke to had no children, and some weren't married — though they wouldn't accept that other women didn't come because of domestic commitments: "They *work* here don't they, and they have kids."

Teachers and women from the women's movement have offered to help run a creche during the school holidays so that more women can take part. Least able to get involved are the Asian women workers whose families won't allow them out in the evenings — and night duty is now vital.

A Powerful Bond

Those who do come think they're likely to be victimised afterwards. "There'll be trouble going back. We should've all stayed out." A woman at the back gate was firmly stopping unknown cars and questioning drivers as to their business in the factory — part of the attempt to stop goods going in and out. All Trico cars have a badge, but anyway she now recog-

nised everyone who worked there.

As well as learning more about how the factory fits together, the women have got to know each other better. "When you're working on the shopfloor you haven't time to go round and say 'Hello, how are you'. That's why this has made such a powerful bond. That's the best thing about it."

One woman, a widow, said it "made a change" not to be inside — she wasn't keen to go back. A passing car honked and jeered. "Just like my husband," she said, "he'd turn in his grave and say 'Get back to work, you lazy sod!'"

One or two strikers have drifted back to work, demoralised or unable to cope on the money. They get only £10 strike pay and maybe a tax rebate of a pound or so a week. Social Security has been so difficult that many haven't tried to claim. "One bloke went to the SS and was told the strike wasn't official, when it had been for a fortnight. When the SS rang here to check, they were told there was

no strike! So he didn't get any money.

"They're that prejudiced against strikers. But we've worked hard. We deserve that money."

Dragging their Feet

Because there are four unions in the factory and all the women production workers are in one, the engineering union, it can't be a total strike. "To its favour our union, the AUEW, was quick off the mark, but the others are dragging their feet. The best solution would have been if everybody had come out with the women. It would have been over in a week."

But many of the 1,500 employees are not unionised anyway, especially the office staff, whom it's been hard to involve. "And when some AUEW shop stewards are still in there — it's all wrong. They say they can't afford to come out. But none of us can afford it either."

"The men are the weak links," said the only man on the picket line, "it's the women who've got guts." ▶

WORK NEWS

As rates are below the district average for everyone in the factory, the company argues that women should accept discrimination. The weekly strike bulletins have challenged this — **"TWO WRONGS MAKE A RIGHT?"** The key to better rates is for women to get equal pay. Otherwise they'll continue to be used as cheap labour which keeps other rates low."

But the idea of equality threatens some men. And they're scared that if the women get equal pay, they'll lose their differentials.

Still Transitional?

There is anger at the men still working. "It's not going to be healthy for some people inside — I don't want to work with scabs." And more ominously, from some, "None of us are going to support anything the men ever do."

One woman's husband has been working all along because he's in the GMWU. "He's on our side but his union's not supporting us. But he reckons he's helping us by working. Management has to keep on paying them and there's no

work being done. The place is almost at a standstill."

That's their main hope — "With us women out, production stops, and the boss badly needs his work done. Anyway he's made two offers now, so he's admitted we are underpaid. He's conceded the case."

At first the company refused to make any offer, trying to get the case to an industrial tribunal, obviously hoping to find a way round the Act in court.

The women earn about £6.50 a week less than a few men doing the same job. The company agrees their work is identical, but claims the men earn more only because they used to get extra for doing night work — when they were put onto the same job as the women, they kept the higher rate.

When the question of equal pay first came up, the company wanted the men to take a cut in wages! Now they say it'll sort itself out by "natural wastage" — the men will leave and be replaced by new workers who'll get the same rate as the women get now.

They hope to get away with

this as an "anomalous" or "transitional" situation.

The union decided not to risk a biased tribunal. Sally Groves of the Strike Committee said, "Local papers are running editorials saying we won't go to the tribunal because we've no faith in our case. The point is we have no faith in the tribunals."

But some people still have, seeing them as a final authority. So they might feel defeated if individuals went to a tribunal and lost.

At average workspeed the company's first offer would have meant a £1.53 rise and the second, £2.33. The women rejected both, holding out for the same hourly operation rate as the men. Then whatever performance a woman managed she would get the same pay as a man who performed the same.

Cowboy Convoys

The company is desperate to get raw materials and scab labour in, and spare parts out. On the night of July 11, their first highly organised convoy broke the picket line. The police refused to stop the lorries though they'd covered

up their back number plates and jumped a red light on the main road.

The NCCL prepared four questions on police compliance for Jo Richardson to raise in the Commons. But at the tabling office they were completely changed and came out as "How many police were deployed in the operation?" The strikers knew that already.

Two weeks later the convoys came again. At two in the morning two saloon cars and eight lorries, one full of scab labour, roared past the gates, but the picket was solid and they couldn't break through — a tremendous victory for the women. □

Support, physical and financial, is needed urgently. At a fund-raising social a gang — company backed? — picked a fight with the people on the door and made off with most of the money, about £260. And now it's industry's summer shut-down, the worst time of the year for a strike. So please raise money through your women's group or trade union and send it to: Trico Strike Fund, AUEW House, 1 Woodlands Rd, Southall, Middx.

SISTERS

If you are an engineering staff worker

JOIN TASS

The staff section of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers

If you oppose sex discrimination in jobs, in pay, in opportunity

JOIN TASS

Don't let the employers organise you out of equal pay and equal opportunities. Legislation will not be enough.

YOU NEED ORGANISATION NEGOTIATION

As well as legislation.

Write for application, or organise a meeting.

Contact: Judith Hunt, National Womens Officer, Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers, Technical Administrative and Supervisory Section, Onslow Hall, Little Green, Richmond, Surrey.



LATEST FROM TRICO'S: Trucks Smash Through

On July 29 another convoy came, this time during the day with five coachloads of police. Policemen lined up to hold back the picketers so the six lorries, full of supplies and scab labour, had free passage through the gates into the factory.

Three strikers were arrested and Sally Groves was roughed up by the police. The whole operation took several hours.

Pickers claim the police interfered with a peaceful picket, thus breaking the TU and Labour Relations Act. The NCCL is pressing for answers from the Home Office.

This shows how far the company will go — and whose side the police are on. Strikers say morale is now higher than ever — they're even more determined to win.□

Jill Nicholls

AROUND the TRIBUNALS...

WIVES MUST GO

Sally Hughes, a part-time waitress, was fired while on honeymoon — because her husband John worked at the same hotel in Bromley.

"The general manager was quite happy about us getting married," she told a London Industrial Tribunal, "but while I was on honeymoon I was told not to go back.

"He said he couldn't have wives working with husbands. But I was only part-time anyway. And we wouldn't have seen much of each other at the hotel."□

McALPINE'S CAUGHT

Eleanor Daniels did exactly the same work as a janitor working with her at a McAlpine building site canteen near Chester. The only difference was that he got £57.60 for a 40 hour week, while she got £25.49 for 37½ hours.

The janitor, James Delaney, told a Manchester tribunal: "We do exactly the same job. I hold the ladder for her and she

holds the ladder for me."

Management insinuated that he was doing the job only because he was weak — and alternatively, that as a janitor he had to do "heavier" work at weekends.

But she won — her pay was doubled, and McAlpine's has to pay arrears from January 1, when the EPA came in — nearly £800.□

THE SAME'S NOT EQUAL

The Manchester-based shop workers' union has tabled a motion for the TUC conference calling for stronger equal pay laws.

The Union of Shop Distributive and Allied Workers, half of whose members are women, say that job evaluation schemes provided for under the 1970 Equal Pay Act are unfair to women, due to a certain amount of manipulation by managements. There is still a big gap between women's and men's earnings.

What USDAW wants to see is legislation which gives women equal pay for work of equal▷

value. They feel that the present definition, equal pay for work the same as, or broadly similar to, men's gives management too much leeway in deciding who gets what.□

ORLAKES WIN

After an 11-week fight with their employers, 80 women at Orlakes Plastics, a record-making factory in Dagenham, have won a back-dated pay rise and recognition of their right to join a union.

They used to get just 53p an hour and will now get 68p — the biggest rise possible under the £6 pay limit.□

From Ilkley Moor

The General Will Theatre Group marched into the Arts Council's Piccadilly building on June 25 singing "On Ilkley Moor Bah't At" and demanding more money.

Though the Arts Council is better off this year, they've cut General Will's grant from £9,000 to £8,000. General Will, based in Bradford, helps local people to write and perform their own plays about their own struggles.□

WOMEN IN THE WORLD:

A Comparative Study

This thought-provoking work provides clear evidence that feminist consciousness is a world-wide phenomenon. With contributions by leading men and women scholars from all over the world, it describes the struggle of women in many Eastern and Western societies to gain a voice in the political, religious, business, and social life of their countries.

Alva Myrdal, in her Afterword, discusses the social implications of women's increased longevity, and calls for a new policy direction in regard to human time use.

445 pages. June 1976. £3.95

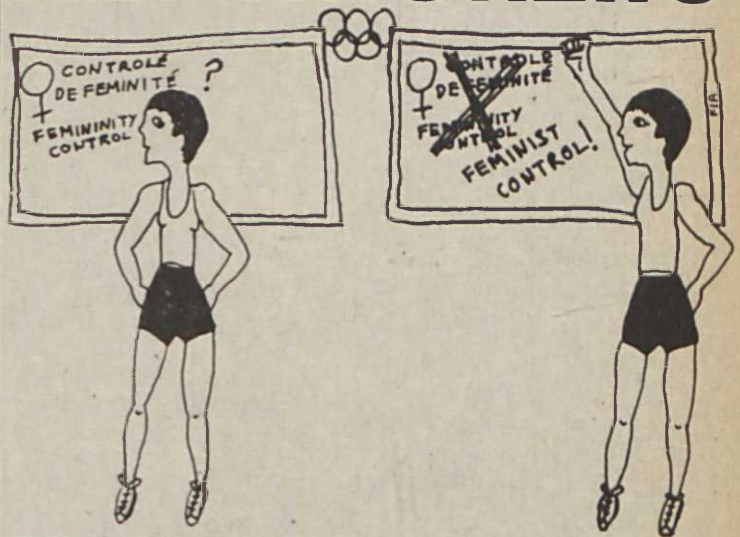
THE AMERICAN SEARCH FOR WOMAN

The first authoritative historical treatment of this subject. Meticulously researched and documented, *The American Search for Woman* treats the four conflicting assumptions about woman's nature that have dominated social history: 1) that she is inferior to man; 2) that she is equal; 3) that she is superior; and 4) that she is "differentially" equal, i.e., inferior in some things and superior in others.

543 pages. June 1976. £4.35

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SPORTS NEWS



LADIES AND LORDS

At last women cricketers have won the right to play at Lords, starting with the 60-over match against Australia on August 4.

Rachael Heyhoe-Flint, team captain, said, "I'm thrilled to bits. It's been my secret ambition to play at Lords since I first played for England 16

years ago."

Not so secret, as she and other women have been trying for years to get in. The excuse has always been that there's no time for women's matches in the crowded schedule. But the ground was free on the date needed, so MCC gave in.

At the Oval on July 28 Rachael Flint batted for 8¼ hours against Australia and scored 179 — which is pretty amazing.□

BODY NEWS

AWARE OF WOMEN'S HEALTH Will the EGA close?

The Elizabeth Garrett Anderson hospital in London, one of only three NHS hospitals run by women for women, is officially to close — but staff, patients and supporters are still resisting. Claire Fazan, who on July 21 took part in a day of action to save the EGA, reports:

Over 2,000 people were involved that day. There were total strikes at the National Temperance and St Pancras hospitals and partial strikes at University College Hospital, the Royal Free and the Whittington. Workers from these hospitals and the EGA joined a big demonstration with people from women's groups, trade unions, local tenants' groups and Camden pensioners' association.

We marched from the EGA to Westminster to lobby MPs — but they spent most of their time asking where the support of the EGA workers and the women's movement had been nine years ago when the authorities started to run the hospital

down. The rest of the time they spent hedging our questions about what they were going to do about the EGA and the cuts in general.

When we'd been in the committee room just under an hour, with very little time for discussion, we were told to leave because there was to be a film show there. One of the EGA workers commented, "When it comes to a toss up

they're more interested in a film than in talking about our jobs, our future."

The lobby was a disheartening end to a dynamic day that had mobilised so many people and a march that had got a fantastic response from people on the street.

Already Inadequate

It can be no coincidence that the hospitals that gave the most support to the day of action are the next in line for Camden's cuts. If we don't win the fight for the EGA, it will make the implementation of other cuts much easier.

These cuts hit women particularly hard. Cutting hospitals means relying on women to work for nothing at home, looking after those who can't get into hospitals or are sent home early. And the planned closure of the EGA is an attack on a health service that already provides inadequate services for women.

Women make on average 25% more visits to the doctor, yet most never get a chance to be treated by a woman doctor. Those who suffer from menstrual problems, vaginal infections or minor illnesses common to women such as cystitis, anaemia or hyper-tension, often

Marching to save the EGA on July 21

find their treatment unsatisfactory.

Research into women's health problems has always lagged behind. It's been left to volunteer organisations like the FPA (now under the NHS), PAS and BPAS, the Women's National Cancer Control Campaign and the Well Woman Clinic to pioneer in these areas.

The EGA does provide training facilities for women doctors, and women with families are allowed the opportunity to both train and work part-time. By concentrating on women's health problems the EGA could begin to develop an awareness of them within the medical profession. In itself it goes nowhere near meeting the need for hospital facilities for women, but it's an important service we must not lose. ☐ Contact the Save the EGA Campaign c/o 30 Camden Road, London NW1.

The Royal College of Midwives warns that mothers and babies are losing the little they've got.

It's planned to cut £10 million from spending on maternity services by 1979/80. That means standards of care will fall — and it'll be even harder to get a midwife if you choose to have your baby at home. ☐



JOHN STURROCK (REPORT)

Brave mother praised

An expectant mother who sued a health authority when she tripped on a hospital step and broke a leg was praised for bravery but refused damages at the High Court yesterday.

Mrs Judith Moore tripped on the steps of Zachary Merton Maternity Hospital, Littlehampton, Sussex, in April, 1973, and fell awkwardly to save the baby. She sued the South-west Thames regional health authority, claiming that the step was dangerous, but the judge said she had failed to prove negligence.

Mr Justice Caulfield said: "As a good mother she was concerned to avoid damage to the baby she was carrying. She sacrificed to a great extent the ease of her fall. It was the baby in her womb that she wanted to preserve. And she was successful. The baby was born and everybody was jubilant that it was unaffected by this tragic accident."

Mrs Moore, aged 39, of Westway, Littlehampton, broke two bones in her left leg and when baby Deborah, now three, was born she was still in plaster.

...but not rewarded.

Rump Committee Reports

The most important and dangerous recommendations are:

- ★ Financial separation of charitable referral agencies and nursing homes. At present BPAS and PAS use profits from the nursing homes to subsidise women who can't afford the full fees. Instead, the Committee proposes the agencies "depend upon fees and genuine charitable contributions".

- ★ Reduction in upper time limit at which an abortion could be legally performed from 28 weeks to 20 weeks (the 28 week limit is found in the Infant Life Preservation Act, not the 1967 Abortion Act, which has no limit). Over 20 weeks, exceptions would be made if the woman's life were at stake or if the foetus was believed to be greatly disabled — a "Statutory Instrument" would be needed to give permission for such an abortion.

The Report claims that the main issue is danger to the mother, but it's clear that what really lies behind this recommendation is the question of viability of the foetus — i.e. whether it can sustain an independent life. Hence it opens the way for further reductions in the time limit.

- ★ More paper work is called for. Legislation is recommended empowering the police to search and remove records at clinics, advisory agencies and even pregnancy testing centres. Another proposal provides for the anonymity of witnesses who have had, or have "been advised about" an abortion. Taken together, these proposals open the way for malicious complaints against doctors, as has happened in New Zealand, which has similar legislation and where a current case has been to appeal three times.

- ★ All procedures "done with intent to terminate a pregnancy if such exists" must be reported in the same way as an actual abortion. This includes menstrual extraction, done before the woman knows she is pregnant — the doctor must examine the results to determine if foetal material is present. It could also include D and Cs, if there was any chance the woman might be pregnant at the time. If an effective morning after pill is ever produced, what effect would this proposal have?

It would certainly send abortion statistics rocketing.

New Restrictions On Abortion

The first report of the Select Committee on Abortion came out on July 28. (This Committee, originally set up to examine James White's Bill, now consists only of anti-abortionists, as all the sympathetic MPs resigned in February.) As expected, if all its recommendations were put into effect, it would be even harder to get an abortion. The Report lays the ground for yet more restrictions, and promises that another Report will be presented later.

- ★ One of the two doctors giving permission in the case of a private abortion should be "of five years standing" (there's no 'maturity test' for any other operation), they should not be partners, or have financial interests in the same nursing home or agency.

- ★ The fine for contravening the regulations should go up to £1,000 and the time limit for prosecutions be extended.

Perhaps more important than what the Report says is what it doesn't say. Nowhere does it mention the rights of the woman, except her right to give permission before her GP is informed of the termination. None of the proposals will in any way ensure that more abortions can be done on the NHS — or that they will be done earlier.

The sum total of the proposals means the opposite — abortion will be more difficult, procedures will become more bureaucratic, anti-abortion doctors will be strengthened, more women forced into the private sector.

Shifty and Sinister

At the Press Conference launching the Report, the Select Committee Chairman, Fred Willey, refused to say whether their intention was to reduce the number of abortions. Leo Abse, the real power behind James White's Bill and this Committee, eventually admitted that it was.

But the anti-abortionist hard-liners aren't overjoyed at the

proposals. LIFE complains that there's no recognition of "the fundamental fact that the unborn child is a human being". SPUC hopes that will soon come — in the meantime they are pleased with the new police powers and the attack on charities like BPAS.

It's true that the Report doesn't go as far as White's Bill — it doesn't change the grounds for abortion. This is because there was no real evidence (only prejudice) to support more drastic attacks — the Committee was hard pressed to point to evidence to back up its more restrictive proposals as it was.

Doctors at the Press Conference of the Committee to

Defend the '67 Act were clear that several of the proposals were unworkable, or dangerous, or restrictive — some all three, especially that relating to reporting all possibly abortive procedures.

What Next?

Some proposals require a change in regulations; others require new legislation. At a meeting with NAC and ALRA before the Report came out, David Ennals, Minister of Health, promised "wide consultation" on any proposals the Committee might produce.

So it's vital that all those concerned with defending our already limited access to abortion ensure that their MPs and the DHSS know what they feel about this Report. But this sort of individual action, though important, is only part of our battle. In the autumn there'll be attempts to reconvene the Committee, to get the Government to present legislation based on this and the next Report, and to get a private member's Bill.

At a packed public meeting in the Commons on July 29, NAC discussed how to fight all this. One definite plan is to hold a Tribunal in January where evidence will be presented to show how abortion facilities are restricted in this country and how this endangers women. NAC needs everyone's support. □

Leonora Lloyd

DOWN TO HIS G-STRING

Alvin Starr, a male stripper, was down to his black leather G-string and leather gloves when he was arrested — for putting on an indecent exhibition and aiding and abetting keeping a disorderly house.

Apparently women were jumping on tables and screaming "get them off" during his show at the Frog and Nightgown pub in the Old Kent Road, London.

Pc William Hedgeley said in Camberwell court: "The stage was surrounded by a large crowd of females. When I got there I saw he was simulating masturbation with his right hand and holding open the front of the G-string with his left."

Starr — real name Patrick

O'Donnel (23) — pleaded not guilty; the case was adjourned till August 23, so more next month. Can you imagine them arresting a woman stripper for indecent exposure? □



PARTY NEWS

GROANING AT CALLAGHAN Labour Women Get Restless

Organised in over 1,000 women's sections which service the rickety party machine, Labour Party women have for decades kept their place. Will the Healey cuts move them to show their power within the Party? Bea Campbell considers the recent Labour Party Women's Conference.

Labour Party women have their own quarrel with this government which has indulged James White, sold out to men on child benefits and not begun to provide the economic basis for women's social demands.

Gone are the days when one resolution after another would be passed at the annual women's conference calling for nurseries here, pensions there, without a thought to how these could be realised. The conference in Folkestone in June showed a firmer criticism than ever before of the anti-woman impact of the government's strategy.

It must have been an unnerving experience for Jim Callaghan to enter a hall full of 400 glowing women, enjoy the ritual welcome which Labour and Tory leaders expect from their female fold, and then be shouted at.

His first mistake was in imagining that those women see themselves only as men see them. A groan ruffled round the hall when he referred to them as though their only response to the world was as

wives and mothers.

Delegates were constantly using the phones around the hall to check up on the family . . . "Jack, I forgot to tell you there's some cooked fish in the fridge . . . can I say hello to the children . . ." but that wasn't necessarily how they wished to be defined.

His second was to deny that there had been any cuts at all, and they weren't having that.

Shuffling off a Role

He had missed the highpoint of the conference, the abortion debate. Abortion campaigner Dr Berry Beaumont, there for the Socialist Medical Association, hit just the right mood with the mainly older, working class audience when she moved the abortion resolution: to resist all attempts to restrict the availability of legal abortion, supporting women's fundamental right to control their own fertility.

The only woman who seemed to be not only anti-abortion, but anti everything that goes with it, like sex, got a steaming reply from Renee Short, who affirmed not only women's right to abortion, but

women's right to sex too.

So the conference testified to their changing political mood and changing sense of themselves. They are, after all, shuffling off a role acted out for decades.

Although there have been autonomous women's units in the party since the beginning of the century, with a women's conference since 1918, the initial feminist motivation declined with the feminist movement.

The party's woman officer, Joyce Gould, explained that some women's sections are politically engaged while some "are fairly elderly and tend to do fund-raising and make the tea at socials."

"Ten years ago, if you had asked me which was the most typical I would have said the latter, but now the more political ones are coming much more to the fore."

British Babies

In a bizarre debate on the NHS a woman from Neath, backing a motion to keep foreigners out of the NHS, launched into a ferocious tirade about "filthy" Irish tinkers who came to Britain and had babies all over the place. Another Welsh-woman suggested that if foreigners wanted to use the NHS, they could pay for it.

Her jingoistic demand brought uneasy applause and the motion might have tottered through had the delegates not been rescued by a Liverpool

amendment which turned the whole thing into an attack on pay beds.

This debate and others showed how an easy and reactionary argument could sway, but when anyone appealed to their better political nature they would come up fighting — every time. This was clearest during the conference rally, addressed by "our Barbara" Castle and Tony Benn.

Loyalty Running Out

Still very angry about her sacking by Callaghan, Barbara Castle, for many years responsible for constructing policies to restrain wages and restrict trade unions, warned the government that the working class would not go on loyally taking cuts in their standard of living. The government couldn't insist on sacrifice after sacrifice without forfeiting its socialist principles altogether.

But she wasn't talking to the women as equals. After all, she has made it. She smiled, and came on with an intimate approach. "Let me share my fears with you," she said confidentially.

Perhaps the warmest welcome went to Tony Benn. His speech was not flamboyant or rousing. It was a historical analysis of the failure of every Labour government there has ever been, because of their refusal to break with capitalism. As a Cabinet Minister he avoided speaking directly about the present — he left that to Barbara Castle. But he was very effective. He had at least taken them seriously, and that was what they wanted. □

Audience at the Labour Women's Conference



ANGELA PHILLIPS (IFL)

OONAGH M.P.

A LADY IN WAITING

Oonagh McDonald has just won a Parliamentary by-election in Thurrock, Essex, retaining the seat for Labour. She came to the Commons the week the government announced more cuts, which in her election campaign she opposed. I talked to her on the terrace overlooking the Thames, surrounded by male members chortling and clinking their glasses. It was hard to pin her down. I asked how she felt about the cuts:

I think this cutback in public spending is quite the wrong strategy. It won't do what it's intended to do. It won't increase investment in manufacturing industry or confidence in sterling. As far as sterling is concerned you can afford to call people's bluff. It is to some extent still a reserve currency — if sterling collapsed, other Western countries would collapse too, and that's not in anybody's interests. All we can say now is "I told you so".

You could try to do something. What you have to do is work out the best strategy. Suppose the cuts were debated next week, and there was a vote against the government followed by a vote of confidence which was also lost. There would then be a general election in October, and it's the wrong time to go for an election.

We've got to work on a longer term strategy. So I shall not do anything that might bring down the government — it's a very difficult situation.

But isn't that always the trap — that people end up accepting measures from Labour they would never accept from the Tories?

But we have to make sure there is wide trade union support for the rejection of the cuts — and judging by the TUC Liaison Committee meeting yesterday (July 26), the TUC is siding with the government. What can you do? You're isolated. You can't move without the TU movement behind you.

We've got to concentrate on getting across the message that the cuts aren't necessary, that there are other ways of dealing with the difficulties in our economic situation — and that is going to be a longer process.

But don't you feel there is resistance to the cuts? They affect everybody's lives.

There probably is at a grass roots level. But that rejection has to be properly mobilised.

How do you think it could mobilise so that Parliament would notice it?

There are two points in time. One is the TUC conference in September, and the next is the Labour Party conference following it.

If feeling is strongly, clearly and cleanly expressed through resolutions discussed and passed at these two conferences, this will obviously strengthen those of us who oppose the cuts.

But is that your only point of reference? Didn't the cuts come up when you were canvassing?

Not directly. The question was occasionally raised at public meetings and very occasionally on the doorstep. But I don't yet know the constituency well — I was elected by the local party on the Sunday and the writ for the by-election was issued on the Friday. It did come up in relation to people's personal problems, or problems in their locality. Obviously people are worried about housing and the lack of provision for physically handicapped children.

It's not just handicapped children is it. What about nurseries?

There's no nursery provision in the constituency, so there's nothing to cut. Essex County Council, which is Tory-controlled, hasn't taken up even those grants available for expenditure on nurseries. But the need for facilities for children of all ages was expressed again and again.

Have you contacted groups working on this locally?

Some did approach me during the campaign, no doubt more

"I'd like to see more attention given to transferring income from richer families to poorer families — progress is being made." Oonagh McDonald canvassing in a recent by-election in Thurrock. "Racism was a key issue. The National Front played on people's fears about unemployment."

suspect that in some areas the women haven't organised themselves into pressure groups at all. When this was raised on the doorstep I suggested to women that they get together and get something going — then it's easier for me to work in conjunction with them.

Would you call yourself a feminist?

I don't usually hang labels round my neck, but I have always supported women's rights. I belong to "Group 74", which tries to get more women into Parliament. And when I was lecturing in philosophy at Bristol, I was Secretary of the Labour Women's Council.

Why did you join the Labour Party in the first place?

When I first started teaching in a secondary modern school after leaving university, I realised that the children couldn't take advantage of educational opportunities until there were radical social changes. I became a Labour supporter, but didn't join until 1970 when Heath won the election, out of sheer disgust!

And why become an MP?

That's difficult to explain — it's a matter of development. You become a supporter of the Labour Party, you join, become actively involved, pushing on

particular issues. I got involved with industrial policy in connection with the aircraft industry.

So there you are, putting pressure on other people to carry out things that you think should be done. You get to a point where you want to be part of the process that ensures that things do get done.

But do they? Are you satisfied with the equal opportunities legislation we've got, for instance?

No, it's not extensive enough — taxation and social security must be tackled too. And I want to see more women on industrial tribunals — it's not difficult to be nominated by a union. Some women MPs are concerned about the workings of both acts. We're trying to find ways to ensure that the legislation already on the books is better carried out.

That's hard to accept when you think of a case like Trico's. Has that any repercussions here?

There have been five major bills going through their closing stages this week, plus the announcement of the cuts. Really these have occupied people's attention. It's difficult for me to say what impact these things have — I've only been here just over a week. □

Jill Nicholls

SHORTLIST

Please send information to **Anny Brackx, Shortlist** Spare Rib, 9 Newburgh St., London W1A 4XS.

events

Events are listed chronologically

Inspiration and Drudgery
Women's Research and Resources Centre seminar on August 27. The topic 'Inspiration and Drudgery — some thoughts on writers and domestic labour, with particular reference to Proust' will be introduced by Marion Glastonbury. 7.30pm at the WRRC, 158 North Gower St, London NW1.

Scottish Women's Liberation
There will be a planning meeting for the next Scottish Women's Liberation Conference on September 4 at 2pm. Elke Lambers, 29 Polwarth St, Glasgow G12 (Glasgow 334 7057) should be contacted for further information.

National Abortion Campaign Bop

Benefit disco on September 4, and every first Saturday of the month after that in the Basement, 29 Shelton St, London WC2.

Health Festival

In the Pump Room Gardens, Leamington Spa on September 4/5. "There will be a strong section on women's health, with Nancy McKeith teaching self-help, Jean Robinson making a strong attack on current contraceptive methods and childbirth technology, and (in a separate forum) discussing work hazards to health". The organisers are also trying to involve the local community to make natural healing less of a "middle-class trip". Contact Vivienne Brown, The Leamington Spa Good Earth Society, 10a Beauchamp Ave, Leamington Spa, Warwicks (0926-22388).

Troops Out of Ireland

On September 17 a national labour movement delegation will go to Ireland to meet community organisations, Trade Unionists, politicians and lawyers in order to arrive at "an informed and progressive policy which will assist the Irish people to establish their right to national self-determination". Representatives of the women's movement are invited to participate. For details contact the Troops Out Movement, 1 North End Rd, London W14.

National Abortion Campaign Show

NAC will be holding a benefit show on September 19 at the Cambridge Theatre. Artists appearing will include Glenda Jackson, Gay Brown, Frankie Armstrong (all to be confirmed).

Contact NAC, 30 Camden Rd, London NW1 for details.

Women and Science

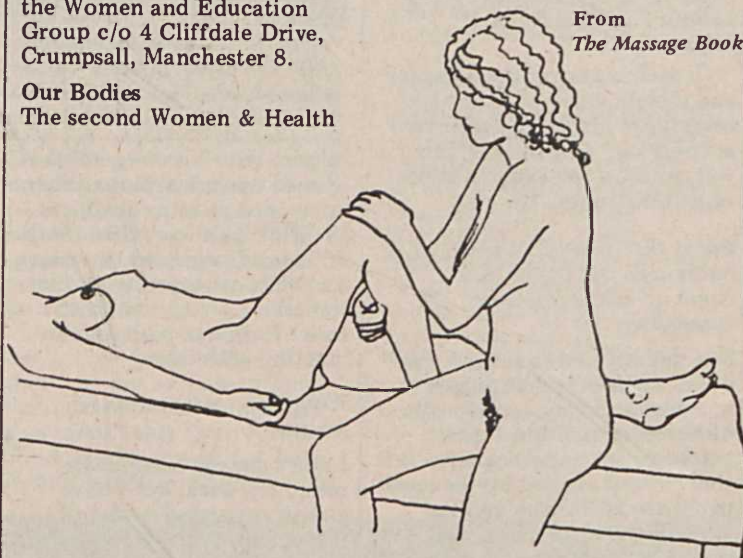
The Women and Science Collective will talk about problems of women relating to science, working in science and science applied to women's issues. At Essex Rd Women's Centre, 108 Essex Rd, London N1 (01-226 9936), on September 24 starting at 2.30pm.

Non-Sexist Teaching

A Non-Sexist Teaching Day is being planned by the Women and Education Group for October 2 from 10am to 5pm at Manchester Teachers Centre, Barlow Moor Rd, Didsbury, Manchester. They want to concentrate on discussing practical approaches to non-sexist teaching and learning and are therefore inviting anyone (male or female) concerned with education. Registration (£1 and 50p to unwaged and students) will include conference reports. There will be a small extra charge for food. Details from the Women and Education Group c/o 4 Cliffdale Drive, Crumpsall, Manchester 8.

Our Bodies

The second Women & Health



From
The Massage Book

Conference will be in Manchester on October 2/3. There will be workshops on the menopause, fighting the NHS and the medical profession, home births, local authority and well-women clinics, nutrition, industrial diseases, compiling a women's health guide as well as room for self-examination and massage. Plans for a central information centre and a health newsletter should also be discussed. If you are preparing a paper or want to do a workshop please inform Manchester Women's Health Group c/o Grass Roots Bookshop, 109 Oxford Rd, Manchester.

Women's Rights

The Rights for Women Unit is planning two one-day courses, intended for trade unionists,

social workers, citizen's advice bureau and law centre workers as well as lawyers. Equal pay and sex discrimination in employment will be dealt with under 'Advocacy in the Industrial Tribunal' on October 21; and sex discrimination in other areas (housing, education, credit facilities) on November 4 under 'Advocacy in the County Court'. Both events will take place in London. Address, times, cost, notes and programmes can be obtained from the Women's Rights Officer, National Council for Civil Liberties, 186 King's Cross Rd, London WC1X 9DE.

A New World for Women?

Women in Media are planning a seminar on the working of the Sex Discrimination Act, for October 23, to be held at Bedford College, Regent's Park, London NW1 (Tuke Hall). Workshops on childcare, sexism

in education, discrimination in jobs, protective legislation and the operation of the Equal Opportunities Commission. The fee is £3 per person, which includes buffet lunch, creche and tea. Apply to Women in Media, 103 Elgin Crescent, London W11.

Linking Midlands Women

Birmingham Women's Liberation are coordinating a regional conference for October 30/31 in Centre 13, School Rd, Moseley, Birmingham 13. They are still open to suggestions but have in mind a weekend with workshops on art, music, health, abortion as well as films, picnic and a disco. There will be a creche and accommodation and meals will be provided. Register in advance (£1.50)

with the Women's Centre, 76 Brighton Rd, Balsall Heath, Birmingham 128QH (021-449 2931).

film, songs & poetry

Music Workshop Songbook

This is a collection of songs from the women's movement and the working class struggle. The people who compiled and wrote this selection want to put their music into a political context, unlike pop songs that merely "feed on emotions and fantasies". Their songs and politics are about people's everyday lives and by publishing this collection they want to encourage others to put their experiences into words and music. Copies of the *Hackney and Islington Music Workshop Songbook* can be obtained from 2a St Paul's Rd, London N1 at 40p + 12p postage per copy.

Poetry

Libby Houston *A Stained Glass Raree Show and Plain Clothes*, London: Allison & Busby, 1967 and 1971, 25p and 30p. Technically accomplished and witty entertainments. Eithne Strong *Sarah, In Passing*, Dublin: Dolmen Press, distrib. by Oxford University Press, 1974, £1.50. Passionate exploration of images and experiences of women.

Donna Dickenson, Loise Jones, Val Leon, Julie Wieland *In Four Minds*, Birmingham: Arts Lab Press, 1976, £1. Poems in differing styles by four women living in the Midlands. Nice illustrations. Order from Birmingham Arts Lab, Tower St., Birmingham B19 3UY.

Nadira Susuri *Female Contractions*, Jordan: Arabesque, 1975. A collection of words and pictures exploding female stereotypes. Orders and enquiries to the author, POB 3206, Jabal Amman, Amman, Jordan.

Susan Saxe *Talk Among the Womenfolk*, Philadelphia: Susan Saxe Defence Fund, 1976.

Feminist poems written by Saxe when she was living underground. She is now in prison; all proceeds from sales will go to her defence fund. Orders and enquiries to the publishers c/o Philadelphia National Lawyers Guild, 1427 Walnut St, Philadelphia, PA 19102. Stephanie Smolinsky *These Cardboard Streets*, London: Stephanie Smolinsky, 1976, 25p. Delicately and wittily designed collection of drawings and poems published by the author herself. Strong dark passionate responses to oppression masquerading as romanticism, radical chic, decadence. Terrific. Orders to Stephanie Smolinsky, 32 Bravington Rd, London W9.

Michele Roberts

Women's Film List

This is a list of women's feature and experimental films and also a selected list of short films and documentaries that are available in the UK. The list is meant for the use of women planning courses and programmes of films for women's studies, meetings or festivals. Available from Christine Gledhill and Nicky North, British Film Institute, 81 Dean Street, London W1.

projects

Sorting Out Feminism

There is now a group meeting once a month at the Women's Liberation Workshop office, 38 Earlham St, London WC2 (01-836 6081). The discussion is centred around the idea of an autonomous women's movement and whether a left take-over is paranoia or reality. The group is open to all women and has already touched on topics like the role of consciousness raising, sexuality, women and workplace organising. The basic question is: what are the differences between radical feminist and socialist feminist theory and practice and is there a common basis for action?

Working Class Women

"We were confused about where we stood, who we were in the women's movement and we started to realise it had something to do with our language, the way we were, our class." The Working Class Women's Group is not in any way aligned with a political or sexual tendency; they are feminists open to all working class women who want to confront the reality of their situation. They will meet on August 28 and every second Saturday after that. Phone Evelyn for time and place (01-720 4986).

Printing

"We are a women's collective taking over the Moss Side Press in Manchester from August. Established for six years the press is the only community press in Manchester. We do not see ourselves as an exclusively feminist press but feel part of the network of alternative presses around the country. We do want more women to communicate their ideas. We are also available for information about layout, printing and costing. And last, we badly need financial help. We need to pay off debts and want to buy a new offset-litho machine; with £1,000 we could get a good secondhand one and print bigger and better. Support us by sending work and money. Love from Sheila, Angela and Luchia." Moss Side Community Press, 121a Princess Rd, Manchester 15 (061-226 7115).

campaigns

Legal & Financial Independence

The group of women working for this Women's Liberation Movement demand have produced a campaigning *Discussion Kit*. It includes suggestions for talks, fact sheets on the family and women at work, hints on how to involve your union and how to use the Equal Opportunities Commission.



This extremely useful kit costs 50p and is available from 7 Killieser Ave, London SW2.

journals & articles

Banshee

Banshee means fairy woman, a person of wisdom and joy. It is also the only feminist journal in Eire and the voice of Irish-women United. The group started in April 1975 and their major fight is against the repressive laws on contraception and abortion. They have ongoing workshops on employment, social welfare, education, political theory, sexuality, children's rights as well as consciousness raising groups. The Irish Women United Charter has some important points that the women's movement in England should perhaps consider: the demand for "state provision of an adequate place to live irrespective of sex, age, number of children and marital status". *Banshee* reflects the diversity of the group and an attempt to overcome sectarianism.

Banshee, c/o Irishwomen United, 12 Lr. Pembroke St, Dublin 2; price 15p + p&p.

pamphlets

A Record of Rape and its Results

It took the writer's life savings to produce this pamphlet. It is an account of the physical and mental suffering of a woman following her rape, over 30

years ago. She contracted gonorrhea from her rapist and tells of the appalling treatment given her by the medical profession. One doctor aborted her, without telling her beforehand, on the grounds that the baby might have been deformed by VD. As a result she haemorrhaged severely. Her family, fearing she might commit suicide when her first husband deserted her, put her in the hands of psychiatrists and mental institutions. She was treated as if she was suffering from delusions and was thought to be a prostitute. She was unable to get credibility concerning her rape — the rapist was a medical officer in the RAF.

It is a journey from one nightmare to another. It's not only about rape, but about the attitudes of medical and mental institutions — a totally patronising disregard of what women say about their own condition. It also shows how a family can be part of the 'conspiracy' to silence a woman.

Available from Joan Jones c/o The Post Office, Muswell Hill Broadway, London N10 1BS. Price £1.36 per copy.

Barbara Charles

Women Under Attack

The latest 'Anti-Report' from Counter Information Services details the ways women are being attacked by a government that boasts of its reforms for women. It focuses on economic strategy, but tries to draw out the implications for all aspects of our lives. It covers the laws for equality, the history of women's role in the economy, the cuts and part-time work. It went to press just as Healey announced his pay deal, and made a wrong assumption about the effect on equal pay — it is still possible outside the pay norm.

The factual approach is a problem — it is argument, but documented so thoroughly that it comes over as statement of fact. So it's hard to think about and discuss, but invaluable as a source of information and definitely useful reading.

Women Under Attack, CIS report, 9 Poland St, W1 (01-439 3764). 45p per copy.

Jill Nicholls

Salford Aid to Battered Women

This two-month survey was sent out to social service agencies, health workers, voluntary organisations and refugees in the Greater Manchester area. Its aims were three-fold: to find out how many women were involved; to discover what happens to them at present; and to find out what they need that the agencies cannot supply.

The findings of the survey endorse the 1975 Select Committee on Violence in Marriage report that "one family place per 10,000 of the population should be the initial target". This would give a figure of 28 for the Salford area; SABW found that, in practice, 15 places would be needed per month with an additional 10 women needing occasional refuge and 20 needing Day Centre facilities.

Emerging strongly from the report is the urgent need for a refuge: "What is clear is that there is much confusion about where a battered woman can go for help, policies seem to be contradictory, and there is no consistency in the way women are treated by agencies."

Salford Aid to Battered Women (SABW), Survey Report, February 1976. Price 20p each from Pam Bishop, 17 Hillside Drive, Pendlebury.

National Women's Aid Federation Press and Publicity Group

Cosmic Mother

Monica Sjoo's account of *The Ancient Religion of the Great Cosmic Mother* (reviewed in SR 47) is now available again with an added ten pages. Orders to M. Sjoo, 18 Beaufort Rd, Bristol 8 (50p + p&p).

Women, the Unions and Work

This is a reprint of Selma James' original paper that sparked off a very crucial debate within the women's movement in 1972 and has led to the Wages for Housework Campaign. In addition there is an article by Selma James entitled 'The perspective of winning' in which she deals with some of the major criticisms of the original paper. *Women, the Unions and Work* is available from the Wages for Housework Women's Centre, 129 Drummond St, London NW1. Price per single copy: 35p + p&p.



From *Women, the Unions and Work*

FOREIGN NEWS

PHOTO COURTESY OF ANTI-APARTHEID



SOWETO: TEARING DOWN APARTHEID

A mission school in Natal, South Africa, closed at the end of July after 280 girl students between 12 and 19 years old went on a night-long rampage to destroy their single-storey hostel. As the girls attacked the building they sang anti-government slogans.

Why have school buildings become a target for young blacks?

The Bantu education programme was introduced in 1954 explicitly to keep blacks down, writes *Joyce Sikakane, who was born and brought up in Soweto.* Black children see the schools as institutions of indoctrination, part of the apartheid state machinery against which they are waging war.

The move by Vorster's regime to enforce the use of the Afrikaans language in secondary schools culminated in a protest demonstration on June 16 by 30,000 pupils. The police opened fire. As a result 176 people died and more than 1,200 were injured in Soweto and other townships (that is, residential areas for blacks who work in white towns — theoretically, blacks now live in Bantustans, their 'homelands', so those who live in the townships are officially migrant labourers, with no rights at all).

Students destroyed police vehicles, banks, beer-halls and bottle-stores, administrative offices and sections of the tribal universities. The government responded with military methods.

Arresting 'Ringleaders'

They had just introduced the Internal State Security measures — known as the SS laws — which meant people could be detained indefinitely without ever appearing in court.

Two days before the Soweton 'disturbance', Lindiwe Sisulu, daughter of Walter Sisulu who is serving life sentence on Robben Island, was detained in the townships. During the riots

alleged ringleaders of the pupils were arrested. Ever since there have been unconfirmed reports of African women and girls in similar plight. Dr Fatima Meer, national president of the South African Black Women's Federation and sociologist at Natal University, has been banned — confined to one area, prohibited from communicating with other banned persons or attending meetings.

As reports of continuous unrest filter out of South Africa more and more women will be victims of the notorious SS law.

So-where-to?

It comes as no surprise that the spark that ignited the riots started in Soweto (jocularly called by its inhabitants 'so-where-to'), the largest single modern ghetto in Africa. Born out of white greed and racism, it exists to house the blacks who serve the whites in Johannesburg.

The red-brick houses that make up the smog-smothered ghetto are built opposite each other in straight single rows running parallel to a street. A common feature of the grim settlement is that each house has a back-yard toilet separated by a common wall from that of a neighbour's. Naked bulbs hanging on roughly installed electric cables cast a dim light inside the casements.

Separately built in each of the 13 locations are the most notorious and derogatory houses known as the Hostels. These

long narrow-built compartments accommodate 'single' men. Women are not allowed to venture into the hostel premises which are fenced by barbed wire.

Hovels for the Unwed

A hostel for those single women who qualify to stay has also been built in Soweto, situated in Mzimhlophe Location. It consists of four-roomed houses each with a common bathroom. Two occupants share a room.

The 'single' women inmates of this hostel are mostly domestic servants, factory workers and office workers. They are mostly from the 'homelands'. Some of them are push-outs from the Soweto housing system, girls of working age who no longer qualify to stay with their parents.

Widows and divorcees, orphans and unwed mothers are also included. Mothers are not allowed to reside with their children in the hostel, and men are forbidden in the hostel premises. All around is barbed wire.

By law no woman without a husband is allowed tenancy of a house. Young working mothers face special hardship in Soweto. They are desperate for nursery centres that would provide proper care for their children while they are at work. Black women suffer the double burden of belonging to the super-exploited working class and being discriminated against sexually and racially. □

EIRE: Who Controls Birth?

In Eire in July a national campaign called Contraception Action Programme (CAP) was launched to press for the legalisation of contraception.

It also wants to make sure that all the health and education services relating to birth control are provided (sex education in schools, contraceptive counselling in maternity clinics), and that contraceptives are actually available, and distributed cheaply or free.

The campaign is supported by many women's organisations who are worried that likely changes in the law will be inadequate.

Anyone who regularly reads the Irish press might think it's only a matter of time before contraception is legally available there. Since the defeat of a bill in the Dail (Parliament) in 1975, prominent public figures from the two parties which make up the ruling coalition — Fine Gael and the Labour Party — have spoken out in favour of a change in the law. This May a Fine Gael conference agreed that contraceptives should be legally sold. Letters pages since have been full of the debate.

An Eye to the North

But women's liberation groups are sceptical: the public debate is not based on concern for the needs of women for contraceptive services.

Many of the arguments centre on whether Ireland should become a secular state. This is discussed either religiously, in terms of the role of the Catholic Church as moral guide, or more opportunistically, with an eye to one day incorporating the Protestants of the North into an Irish state.

Conor Cruise O'Brien, Minister of Post and Telegraphs for the Labour Party, who recently made a speech in favour of contraception, was taking this pragmatic point of view as early as 1973, when he

"SNUFF" MOVIES

The Climax is Murder

In the final scene of a film shown in America early this year, a young woman is seen to be murdered and disembowelled in front of the cameras. The film *Snuff* is the ultimate in sadistic pornography. It's supposed to offer the vicarious thrill of seeing the killing of an unsuspecting actress.

These kinds of films, called "snuff movies" (in which the actress "snuffs it") are thought to have been around as long ago as the Manson murders. They are said to have been made originally in South America, in Argentina, by a

mafiosi right-wing terrorist organisation called Triple A, existing within the police and army and founded by Jose Lopez Rega, then Minister of Social Welfare.

Their control of brothels enabled them to get a prostitute who thought she was participating in a standard blue movie — the "kick" is her last-moment realisation of impending death.

Snuff is a more commercial version, trying to cash in on the appeal of a woman's murder. It too claims to come from South America (so casting smears on that continent) and is said to have been smuggled into the USA.

Pigs' Carcasses

When it opened in New York, women organised nightly pickets, and protests forced the film's

said that the South should show the Northern Protestants that the Catholic Church had lost its power in the state.

This way of thinking doesn't hold out much hope for a change in the law that has taken into consideration the whole range of needs involved in the introduction of contraception.

Not Codeine

At present in Ireland it's not illegal to import or make personal use of contraceptives. But there is a ban on their "sale, distribution, advocacy and advertisement".

A government bill, which was defeated but will come up again soon, is concerned mainly with the sale of contraceptives. It treats contraceptives as a commodity. It is not concerned with contraception as such. That is why women's groups are so critical of it.

In their magazine *Banshee*, Irishwomen United, a Dublin-based women's liberation group,

attack the government's "slot machine mentality", saying: "The bill offers to make contraceptives available at a price, but there is more to birth control than swallowing a pill or inserting a device. Contraception is a sociological issue. It should not be treated like codeine."

The government's bill puts heavy restrictions on the sale, advertising and distribution of contraceptives, so it won't be easy for women's groups to fill its gaps without going against the law.

So in May Irishwomen United wrote an open letter to the national press calling on women's organisations to support a national campaign for a change in the law which will ensure "that women have full control, with full knowledge, over their own bodies". The result was CAP. □

Sue O'Halloran

Contact CAP (and Irishwomen United) c/o 12 Lr. Pembroke St., Dublin 2.



POSTER REDRAWN BY ROWENA HARNELL

PUBLICITY POSTER

closure in Baltimore and Philadelphia. A telegram signed by 80 writers and artists was sent to the District Attorney Robert Morgenthau demanding "the immediate investigation, prosecution and removal of this barbaric film".

The film's distributor claimed no crime was committed, saying the film was no more violent than several others. After a two month investigation Morgenthau called a press conference to announce that the murder was in fact a fake, that the actress concerned was alive and well, and that pigs' carcasses had been used for the scene.

They had also discovered that the final scene had been tacked onto a film called *Slaughter* made in Argentina in 1971. This showed in the USA some years ago without commercial success. But with this extra attraction, crowds had been drawn to see *Snuff* at the National Theatre in Times Square.

An Implicit Threat

But even if no-one was actually killed in *Snuff*, it is suggested by Angela Dworkin for instance in the *New York Times* that its success will create a demand for the real snuff movies, resulting in the torture and murder of women for the sake of entertainment and profit.

She thinks the knowledge that this film is showing will produce an atmosphere in which rape will be more easily committed and condoned. "Its very presence here is an implicit threat which creates fear in women for their lives." Even Robert Morgenthau was "concerned that this kind of film might incite or encourage people to commit violence against women, but there is no basis for a criminal prosecution."

Protestors are confronted by the liberal defenders of free expression who see the film's suppression as unnecessary censorship, referring to America's 1st Amendment about free speech.

But Leah Fritz, also writing in the *New York Times*, comments that: "The fact is that the 1st Amendment doesn't belong to everybody — not equally. It belongs most to those who control the media." The controlling interests of capitalism and profit-making coincide with those of the media, and so women's bodies become commodities on the open market. *Snuff* is the end result of men's control of the media using women for entertainment. □

Sue Sharpe

HOME NEWS

'I felt trapped, didn't know who to talk to...'

REFUGE FOR DUNDEE

In August, Dundee Women's Aid move into a new refuge which can take nine or ten women with children, more than the temporary refuge they've been in since March.

Ingrid Muir reports:

That three-bedroomed council house took in over 30 women and 60 children in five months, offering the women both freedom from physical violence and a chance to talk to other women and regain some confidence and self-respect.

Annette, married four years and in the refuge since June, said:

"The refuge gives you time to think and get organised. My husband wanted to dominate me completely. He was very fussy about the house, always criticising my housekeeping.

"He gave me a black eye and a burst lip when I was expecting my first baby, and when I went into labour he went on about the ironing needing doing:

"He was never in, always at the pub. He thought if you had a roof over your head and food to eat that was all you needed. I felt trapped, didn't know who to talk to. A friend told me about women's aid. The Social Services gave me the number and I left within the hour."

Keeping up the Pressure
Dundee Women's Aid got the temporary refuge after a two year battle, organising fund-raising and petitions, having innumerable meetings with Dundee Corporation and Tayside Regional Council.

One of the group, Rosy Smith, told me: "We had to keep up the pressure. The local authority were sympathetic, but took no action. But after we gave evidence to the Select Committee on Domestic Violence we got the house very quickly."

The refuge is run on a self-help basis — the women living there receive other battered women. Once a week they meet with the women's aid group to sort out policy and problems. The meetings feel informal, even casual, but all the business of rent-collecting, rehousing and visits to the hospital or Social Security gets done very quickly. A separate group helps with the children.

No Fires, No Escape

One problem is the attitude of officials. Some social workers are more concerned with saving marriages than with the women's well-being — they try to persuade women to see their husbands, even putting husbands on the phone without asking permission. "No-one cared that I was battered for 15 years," one woman said.

But few officials are as blunt as Dundee's ex-Director of Education who refused to sign a women's aid petition on the grounds that a refuge would allow women to 'escape' when they should stay and mend their marriages.

The new refuge will have no open fires, not as you might imagine because of the children, but because the Fire Officer didn't think the women would be able to cope!

A Fresh Start

Dundee has a reasonable stock of council houses so women are rehoused fairly quickly. This is important as none of the women I spoke to wanted to return to their husbands. They were anxious to make a fresh start on their own.

Annette said, "I don't think I'd ever go back. It would be a waste of time." Another woman added, "You get to the stage where you don't want to get involved with a man again." And quick rehousing means the refuge is available to more women.

Women coming from outside Dundee will also be rehoused. One came from Bradford to get right away. Dundee Women's Aid have initiated a campaign on rehousing, suggesting that cities agree to reciprocate, but so far the response hasn't been encouraging.

Of the 56 authorities contacted, three didn't reply, eight sent formal acknowledgements, four sent positive letters, four were negative and nine ambivalent. Still, the issue is on the agenda of the next meeting of the Convention of Local Authorities.□

Patching up the Ugly Sisters

Forty people left in Haigh Heights, one of three tower blocks in Liverpool known as the Ugly Sisters (see *Spare Rib* 42), protested on July 26 when corporation maintenance workers started doing major structural repairs. The men agreed not to come in as long as the protest picket was on.

The work is dangerous — with sinks thrown from seventh floor windows — and dirty, causing rats, dust and more housework. Why is it being done now? When the Ugly Sisters were full of families, they were the worst in Liverpool. Five died in a fire last December.

After rent strikes and demonstrations, most families

were moved out onto estates, though the council won't re-house the tenants, mainly single women, who are left in 16 of Haigh's 72 flats. Yet they want to move students in instead — probably because the Polytechnic has guaranteed to pay their rent — so they're doing up the flats and at last putting a security guard on (there have been several break-ins since May).

On July 27, tenants from all over the city — especially women who came in coaches from estates on the outskirts — demonstrated against the council's plan to change all Liverpool's tenancy agreements so that they are no longer responsible for maintenance of common areas — stairs, lifts, lighting and rubbish shutes. If this goes through, maintenance workers will be laid off, and housing will get tattier and more dangerous.□

ARE WIDOWS SINGLE?

For more than 20 years, Cruse, founded by Margaret Torrie, was the sole voice for widows, writes *Mary Stott, herself a widow*. It has done, and is still doing, splendid work. But though it has many friends in the House of Commons it has never been a pressure group.

About five years ago a Stafford widow, June Hemer, feeling there was a need for a pressure group, founded a real grass-roots, non-establishment, nationwide organisation, the National Association of Widows. It has grown so steadily that at the Fourth Annual Meeting at Stafford in June, there were 400 members from branches all over Britain.

Last summer a Widows Advisory Trust was set up by the NAW with the aid of a Home Office grant to test whether widows really are the best people to counsel widows. Members of the NAW feel they are, supporting each other in their homes and in groups, but Cruse prefers professional social workers.

Certainly only widows seem to understand their particular problems with income tax deductions. It may sound sensible for a widow to be treated as a "single person" for tax purposes, but she is not in the same situation as an unmarried woman. She's likely to have more commitments, perhaps a home she

never expected to have to maintain on her own, and she'll lose more in tax because her pension is taxed as well as her wage.

And it's not hard to understand the feelings of a widow working side by side with a married woman whose husband is in good employment, if her take-home pay is very much less.

At the Stafford conference women queued up at the microphone to express their indignation at the way the taxman treats them. One said she was paying 49% of her income in tax — because of underpayment in the six months after her husband's death.

Mayors and Spies

The NAW is planning a "pilgrimage" to Parliament next spring. It won't be a march but a bus ride, starting at Edinburgh and calling en route on as many mayors as practical to enlist their support.

Most of the three million widows in Britain are elderly, but 500,000 of them are under retirement age and many of these have dependent children. NAW work alongside Gingerbread and the National Council for One Parent Families, especially in relation to the cohabitation rule, which can result in a widow having her pension book taken away by an investigator on suspicion of living with a man.□

Getting high together

In July about 80 women went to "Women's Week" at Laurieston Hall in Kirkcudbrightshire, Scotland — where a group of people live, share their work and money, and occasionally have larger groups to stay.

"Women's Week" is less formal than a conference; it's intended as a time for feminists to get together. It was a different experience for everyone.

Here's one account:

I arrived feeling low and confused, hoping to reconnect with feminism, to talk and think a lot, and to feel high with other women. Some of us talked about where the women's movement is going and where we are going in it, feeling that we are less sure now that the movement is bigger and we can feel its directions less clearly.

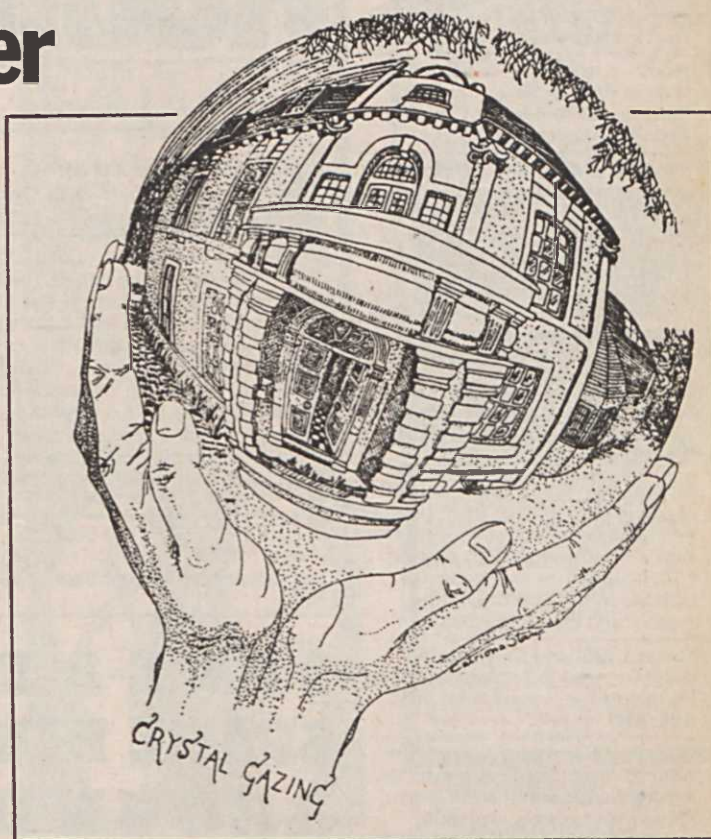
I never really felt part of a single whole group of women while I was there; we seemed too many and too disparate for that, and some women felt disappointed and isolated because of it. We seemed to be each threading our own way through the week. There were practical workshops to go to, for instance on massage, karate

and screen-printing, and discussion groups.

I could feel myself gradually tuning in to the women around me, and myself as a woman — mostly through looking after children, preparing food, going to the pub in the rain, talking late at night; also through the writing group, which met each day to talk about things we'd written.

It wasn't until I got back home that I realised how much stronger I felt, how I had needed that time with women, how I really need longer. When I stuck up my "Sisterhood is Powerful" poster on the kitchen wall after I got home, I really knew again that it is true. □

Mary Lewis



Card of Laurieston Hall by Catriona Stamp. Available from Laurieston Hall, Castle Douglas, Kirkcudbrightshire for 5p each plus postage.

DIVORCE: Forced to do it yourself

From now on if you want a divorce and your husband agrees, you won't be able to get legal aid — if you can't afford a lawyer, you'll have to handle your case by yourself. This saving at our expense is going through with very little publicity or discussion, except within the confines of legal journals.

Helen Bright reports:

In the House of Lords on June 15 the Lord Chancellor, Lord Elwyn-Jones, announced his intention to withdraw legal aid from all cases of undefended divorce as from the end of August. Since few divorce cases are defended nowadays (in other words, both sides usually agree to the divorce), this cut will apply to virtually all cases.

He explained that it was part of the Government's scheme to limit public expenditure, and as such was "unfortunately unavoidable". Legal aid, he said, would continue to be granted in cases of exceptional hardship, but he expected the number of such cases to be "comparatively small".

This is the first time in the 25 year history of the legal aid scheme that such cuts have been made. An estimated £34.5

million is now spent on civil legal aid, and most of the cases for which legal aid is granted are to do with marriage — hence the proposed cuts. (In fact the total cost of civil legal aid is smaller than that of any of the other social services.)

Like the Ritz Hotel

For the woman or man seeking a divorce this will mean that if you haven't enough money to get professional help from a solicitor, you 'do it yourself' — that is, you file your divorce petition by yourself and you conduct your own case.

Miranda Reckitt, former chairperson of the British Legal Association, has pointed out the irony of a Labour Lord Chancellor reinforcing the old situation of the law being "like the Ritz Hotel, open to everyone who can afford it". The wealthy will still be able to

pay for legal advice, and the people who most need it will have to manage without.

The hardest hit will be wives, in particular deserted wives. A deserted wife is likely to be dealing with the demands of Social Security officials, desperately worried about money, deprived of family support and subject to all kinds of pressures, often from the husband, who might threaten to take the children away from her if she doesn't accept whatever deal he has worked out.

At a time when she is emotionally at the lowest ebb, and the most in need of reassurance and proper advice, she is now expected to struggle with the complications of the law by herself and draft her own divorce petition.

Loans for Women

Defenders of this withdrawal of legal aid claim that there is still the 'Green Form' scheme, whereby the solicitor conducts an informal means test to decide if you are eligible. If you are, he can then do work for you to the value of £25, a ridiculously small sum. And besides, even fewer people are eligible for this than for full legal aid.

Divorce proceedings are already hard enough for women. In a case I recently heard of, a

woman student was granted a divorce and then faced with £150 in costs. Her husband, who had agreed to pay half, discreetly disappeared from the scene.

She appealed to her bank manager for a loan, explaining that she had been accepted for a teaching job and would receive a monthly salary, but he refused the loan and on top of that gave her a lecture telling her to "stop these extravagances". She wasn't consoled to hear that a male friend of hers who asked for a £200 loan for a holiday abroad was granted it.

Another woman, subjected to enormous pressure from her husband, finally accepted the sum of £15 a week maintenance for her three children. She soon realised she couldn't manage on this, and because she was getting a grant for a teacher training course, she got no help from the Social Security.

It's just this kind of thing that a woman most needs legal advice on, and with these new proposals, she's not going to get it. □

NEWS COPY DATES

For Spare Rib 51 — Aug 19
For Spare Rib 52 — Sept 17
(If it's urgent, it's worth trying after these dates.)

ACCOMMODATION

Me and little Nathanael urgently need home by end of August. Preferably North East England. Write to Charlotte, 41 Warwick St, Heaton, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Room in house/flat wanted. Convenient Poly Enfield, Mid-Sept. Barbara, 20 Ambleside Grove, Middlesbrough.

Feminist is selling half of house (N London) to similar (with/without kids) for cooperative living. This is a ground floor flat, share garden, 2 large rooms, kitchen, bathroom, £9,500. Phone 883-5927.

Louisa, Joceline, Dieter and baby Jodhi are looking for a place to live in. Write to 72 Brougham Rd, London E8.

Woman wants room weekdays term-time. London. SE. Ring Colchester 77173.

Mother (son age 3) needs to share house in Dublin. One small bedroom one large livingroom, available share kitchen/bathroom. Rent required £10. This will be negotiable if possible in the case of another mother and child. Box 503.

Student (26) and six-year-old daughter need 2/3 room flat. Chalk Farm area for 2 years from Sept. Box 504.

Woman and man and two children want to meet people interested in jointly buying and sharing large house in N London. Box 505.

ASSIFIED CLASSIFI

EVENTS

A women's group in the NEUE GESELLSCHAFT FÜR BILDENDE KUNST, Berlin, is organising a great exhibition about "Women in Art". It will take place in spring of 1977 in the Charlottenburg Palace. Beside important women artists of the 19th and 20th centuries we will also show contemporary feminist artists (working in various medias). We ask all women artists who would like to take part in this exhibition to contact us and send us photos, slides, etc of their works. Ulrike Stelzl, Bulowstrasse 68, 1000 Berlin 30

SPARE RIB BOP is not bopping during August. Watch for new dates and new location in our September issue.

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COURSES

Gain self-confidence by speaking well. Also cassettes — phone 01-794 2941.

RIGHTS FOR WOMEN — ADVOCACY TRAINING COURSES. Organised by NCCL. 21st October 1976: Advocacy in the Industrial Tribunal. 4th November 1976: Advocacy in the County Court. Both courses suitable for lawyers, TU officials, advice centre workers, social workers and individuals interested in the enforcement of Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts. Full details from NCCL, 186 Kings Cross Rd, London WC1X 9DE. Tel: 01-278 4575.

PERSONAL

LESBIAN 40s SEEKS FRIENDSHIP. WARWICKS. Feminine but tressed. Professional occupation. Interests: she writes, paints, musics, poets; humours on paper. Seeks similarly sensitive dreamers and creationists. All letters answered. Genuine. Box 501

Gentleman, considerate seeks wife/girlfriend. 01-769 8585.

Guy 30, tall, cheerful, vegetarian meditator, seeks female. London. Box 507.

Elle, 19, 5'2", 7st 2lb, seeks similar for friendship. Somerset/Bath area. Also penfriends anywhere. All letters answered. Photo appreciated. Sue Box 502.

Diamonds may be a girl's best friend but there must be women about with aims more interesting than matrimonial bliss who would enjoy an unstructured relationship with a highly successful Anglo-American journalist, single, London-based. Box 506.

Companion sought for trip through Canada, America. Leaving about September. I'm interested in working there also. (Male 23). Box 491

GAY SWITCHBOARD 01-837 7324. (Women volunteers for switchboard needed.)

WORK

NOTTINGHAM WOMEN'S AID REFUGE — Worker required. Details from 828 Woodborough Rd, Nottingham. Closing date 1 Sept.

FEMINIST TYPESETTER needs work. Cheap rates offered. Write to Mary, 2 Sunnyside, Liverpool 8.

Voluntary worker wanted for six month old community centre. Hours/conditions flexible. Phone Sue 01-521 2547

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Feminist electricians for domestic repairs, rewiring. Anywhere. 01-278 5985 evenings.

Volunteers for Street Aid to work July 26 to August 31. Working with kids day or evening in Covent Garden area. Expenses paid. Contact Jo or Mitch. Tel: 01-240 1714

DERELICTS ROCK BAND need bass player, preferably a woman, phone 01-960 4059.

THERAPY

HUDDERSFIELD interested in encounter, co-counselling, women's self help therapy group. Contact 0484 58200 Jean.

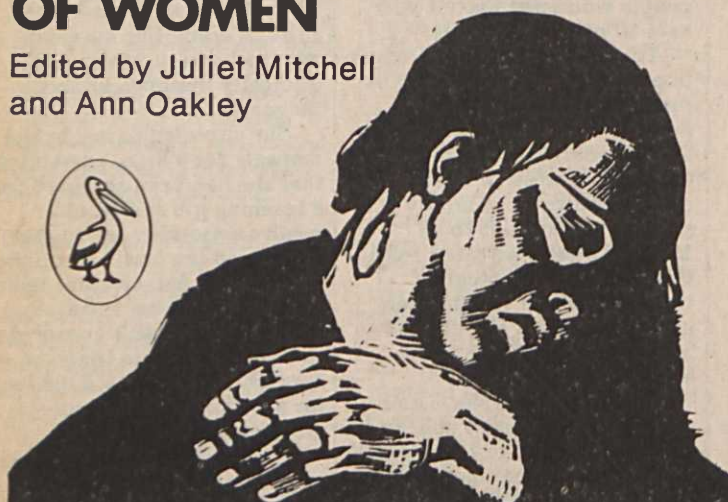
Feminist psychotherapist has vacancies at reasonable rates. 01-624 9131

Woman psychotherapist (Jungian) Tel 01-348 5593 preferably before 10.00am

PRIMAL THERAPY write Jenny James, Atlantis, Burtonport, Letter-kenny, Co Donegal, Eire

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Edited by Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley



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PUBLICATIONS, BOOKSHOPS, ETC.

WOMEN'S LIBERATION WORK-SHOP (Women's Information and Newsletter Service), 38 Earlham St, London WC2 (01-836 6081). Open usually 12-10pm weekdays, 12-6 Sat. Feminist information centre and meeting place. Books and publications, women's groups, referral services, coffee room, meeting rooms, resident film and art groups. V'weekly newsletter (including calendar). Subscription 15p a copy, 10p at the Workshop. Run by an open collective. For women only.

THE GIRLS' GUIDE - 1976 FOR GAY WOMEN. Annual pocket size international bar/club guide and complete directory. This third edition: 2000 listings/40 countries, £2.00 only from THE GIRLS' GUIDE, 1 North End Rd, London W14 (mail order only-one week delivery). Also at: Sterling's Bookstore, 57 St Martin's Lane, WC2 and Symposium Bookstore, 12 Market St, Brighton.

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W

hat do you think of that piece from Zaragoza?" Kathy asked. "Will you give me the OK? Can we count on Tony to keep it quiet?"

"It's a dilemma, all right, something I've been weighing up all

morning," said Harry.

Kathy could never tell which was misshapen — Harry or the old gaberdine suit. A proper Charlie Chaplin, he was, with manilla envelopes and foolscap carbon sheets hanging from his creased brown leather briefcase. No, more of James Stewart as the absent-minded diplomat, bumbling through social banalities, but driven with political commitment. He hadn't bothered to comb the grey wisps over his baldness this morning. She wondered how old Harry was — somewhere in his late fifties if he had fought in Spain.

"Remember Tony's antics in Uruguay," said Kathy, "flaunting his press card. He was lucky to escape intact. We may be spending a lot of money for him to holiday in prison."

"Yes, yes," nodded Harry. "Perhaps we *should* reconsider the assignment."

She played with the coffee seed beads hanging to the waist of her black pullover. The seed beads — being cheap, a tribute to the Brazilian Liberation Fund and still stylish — were among her more successful compromises. She concentrated on Harry's careful words.

"On the other hand," he watched her, "One has to take certain risks, like we did last year over the invasion of Prague."

She released the beads and picked up her fountain pen.

Harry continued, "I suppose that's what journalistic courage is all about. To hell with it. Tell Tony to go ahead. I'll trust my instincts. By the way, thanks for finishing up the layouts. You're my right hand. Don't know what I would do without you."

Kathy packed the solicitor's letters and her notes on South African sport into the frayed blue folder marked "Mock-Up". She listened to the muffled slam from the small front room. The office gulping another person. She felt stuffy lately, cramped. She never believed those gas fires were healthy.

Hilary rang the next day, at the worst possible time. And she was into that damn consciousness raising trip. But she *was* funny, when she got sarcastic about Harry. Kathy really wanted to laugh. Instead, she said, "Nonsense, Hilary. He is totally committed to the struggle. This paper is his life."

"Then he better start making funeral arrangements," said Hilary. "If *The Artisan* survives, it's *your* doing. You're responsible for organising the mock-up, for convincing the contributors to stick around, for getting Colson to reconsider publishing. You've resuscitated it."

"Enough high drama," said Kathy. "Sometimes I wonder how much you defend me just because I'm a woman. Anyway, *enough*, because I've got to get back to work."

"All right, kid. If things don't work out on TA, though, you know you've always got a job back in Birmingham. Take care — of yourself. Cheers!"

Kathy hung up and turned to the secretary, "Alice, could you hold any calls for twenty minutes?"

She spoke through the pots of drugged ferns. She hated the gas fire. If it did this to the plants, what did it do to the people? She stared past Alice, through the dingy window panes. The brick wall across the alley looked like the pointillism she had studied at the National Gallery last term, the image alternately diffused and discernible. She had to clean that window.

The flaccid blonde woman nodded politely from inside her *Daily Mail*, looked up and smiled obligingly, "OK, Mrs . . . I mean, Kathy. I'll tell them you're in a meeting."

It had taken Alice six weeks to call her Kathy. But who was she to talk? It had taken *her* four months to call Harry, Harry. (The same thing with her mother-in-law. It would have been so much easier if she had said, "Call me 'Mum.' or 'Annabel.' or 'Mrs. Edwards.'") And he was characteristically indifferent that day she finally got up the nerve to say, "Harry, I think . . .

"We should work on the logo and the pages if we're going to get them in by Friday."

"Yes, yes," he said. "And the solicitor's coming. Can you tie that up for me? I've got some work to do on the censorship piece. Perhaps you could come in after lunch?"

"Sure, Harry."

She got a good start and didn't want to break for lunch. When people asked why she worked so hard she explained that in a dotty way, she *believed* in *The Artisan*. "Britain's radical literary forum." Their coverage of the Indo-China War was closely watched. She was proudest of the space they gave to trades union politics, to non-intellectuals, breaking down media elitism. She felt like she was helping to change things, not directly, but by being a resource for people who could.

Harry didn't buzz her that afternoon. Just as well because she worked into the evening with the editing. Harry hated multiple reviews, but she was glad she had suggested juxtaposing the books on Canadian and Irish autonomy. Anyway, he would like the critique of *The Female Eunuch*. This chap showed how women's liberation was a bourgeois deviation from the class struggle. If they continued all this nitpicking about who ran meetings, nothing would get done. Hilary would scream Leftist chauvinism, but Kathy agreed with the article. What was wrong with complimenting a man's work at home or in the office, if it were all part of the *same* struggle. What was wrong with typing, for instance? It had been her entree into university politics where she met Craig and into TA itself.

The telephone echoed in the empty room. She hesitated, not wanting to go home late again.

"Senor Harry Simpson, por favor."

"I'm sorry," she scrambled for her A level Espagnol.

"Senor Simpson no esta aqui."

"Oh, Kathy, an English voice broke in. "I'm glad I caught you." The operator faded in a garble of Spanish. "This is Tony Smythe. I've got a great lead. Marquez is briefing a few journalists in the hills above Zaragoza. I need more money and time if I'm going to cover it."

"I'll get Harry on the phone tonight and we'll settle . . .

"No, no time for that. The MULA are taking a small group of us into the hills. They're leaving in an hour. I need to know right away whether I can have £100 expenses and four days on the deadline. If I don't leave with them this evening, I'll never get into the camp."

"Give me forty-five minutes to reach Harry."

"Forty."

"Right, ring me back in forty minutes."

How could Harry refuse an exclusive briefing with Marquez . . . the number was engaged . . . but then, Harry was so reticent about "untested" revolutionaries. Kathy dialled the number again. Engaged. And again. She would never make it over to Albany Street and back in forty minutes. But Craig could. Her only option was to ring Craig.

"Kathy, love, where the hell are you?"

"I'm afraid I'm still at work. Something has come up. An emergency call from Spain. Tony has a chance to go to Marquez' camp, but we have to reach him with the OK in thirty-five minutes." (Silence from the other end of the line.) "I'll explain later. Could you do me a huge favour? I can't get Harry on the phone. Could you drive over there and tell him to ring me here?"

"Well, I don't know. I have my doubts about the Marquez position. The caucus was discussing just this afternoon how that kind of nationalism . . . "Oh, come on, Craig. At least the story should be covered. You can't ignore a movement as large as that."

"Fucking hell, it's not as if I don't have enough to do, preparing the caucus platform, finding time to do my thesis."

"Craig, look, I'm sorry to impose. Dear, I'm sorry I'm late again. But this could mean the survival of TA."

"What about the survival of something euphemistically known as our marriage?"

She agreed with Craig's belief in "healthy confrontation," but she just didn't have time right now.

"Craig, you're being unfair. Let's talk about this when

BY VALERIE MINER

the right hand on th

I get home. Please drive over to Harry's." The authority in her voice seemed to support her and restrain him. "Ask him to ring me on the 07 line."

When she hung up, the only remorse she felt was from her Yoga teacher's lectures on back tension. How could she have taken from Craig's abuse this long? His rambling accusations as he peered into the aquarium feeding his Black Bullheads and Veiltails. The phone rang and she answered it with relief.

"Kathy? Harry here. What's all this about a Spanish Revolution?"

She quickly recounted the story.

"I'll have to think about it."

"But that's the problem. There's no time to think about it. Tony is calling back in twenty minutes."

"Why did you arrange a fool thing like that? This is a big decision. We risk a huge feature hole. On the other hand, a good piece could swing Colson's judgment."

"Yes, yes," she said not meaning to be so brusque, "however we've got to make a decision."

"Don't pressure me," he said. "I'll ring you back."

"OK, Harry, but please remember to call within fifteen minutes?"

"I did hear you the first time. Good-bye."

Had she been too dogged? Craig always said she got hyper in emergencies. Better that than Harry's paralysis. Three minutes to nine. She started to ring Harry, then realised she had to leave the other line open. TA's survival could be secured with one good story. She tried to get Harry on 06 before Tony called back. The number was engaged. Mollified she thought Harry must be ringing back, but no, no, of course not. The other line was still. What the hell was he doing?

She put down the receiver. Immediately, it rang.

"Go ahead with it, Tony. Where do you want the money wired?"

She noted the details of his itinerary and gave him three, not four, extra days for the deadline. She felt elated, surprised at her confidence and her indifference to Harry. She put on her raincoat and gathered several articles into her briefcase. He could call her at home if he wanted to find out what had happened.

Kathy walked briskly to the bus-stop. Usually she let herself be sucked home on the tube. She hated the way people in the underground corridors rushed unconsciously past each other, like numbers in the formula of an ironic computer programmer. The tube was part of her mindless survival in London. (By the time she shuffled to get a smoking compartment, jostled to find a seat, arranged her briefcase and groceries on her lap, she was too exhausted to do anything but close her eyes, practise her Yoga breathing and hope to exhale the parentheses with which she had ordered the day). Tonight, she saw a 137 as soon as she turned the corner. She clinked two-and-a-half pence in the newsvendor's tin, picked up an *Evening Standard* and hailed the swaggering wagon.

Kathy climbed to the top of the bus. She still saw London as a visitor. The Thames from Chelsea Bridge. "Girls, this is the Thames, the mighty river down which Julius Caesar and Saint Ardith journeyed," explained Sister Margaret on that Easter expedition to London. St. Ardith was the patron of their order. Kathy had been chagrined last month to hear that St. Ardie, as the girls in the dining hall called her, had been chucked off the rolls. Even though Kathy had stopped attending Mass five years ago, she felt betrayed by St. Ardie. She studied the floodlit Palace of Westminster, so absurdly elegant for a Labour Government. Westminster Abbey curtsied like a venerable chatelaine in dust-starched skirts. The bus swung round murky Hyde Park Corner, then through the harsh fluorescence of Oxford Street. As they rode up to Camden Town, she turned to her newspaper. She couldn't concentrate on *Two-Tiered Health Service*, *Israel Rejects Amnesty* or *Neigh On EEC Farm Policy*. She opted out for a curious feature

about an American vicar who wanted to father a child. His wife was infertile, so he offered £4,000 for a woman with the proper genetic components to be artificially inseminated and to bear him a baby. "Rent-a-body," thought Kathy. Hilary would call this exploitative. The bus was waddling up towards Archway, so she folded the paper under her arm and manoeuvred down the steps.

Craig wasn't home. He probably stopped off at the pub after Harry's. She just wanted to forget the whole mess. So she tidied up the living-room and went into the kitchen to make Craig's sandwiches. She always made them at night because she hated the smell of mustard in the morning. She left him a sweet note before crawling under the duvet. The shadow of his body became noticeable in the first light. She hadn't heard him come back. She must have slept well. She left him undisturbed at 6 a.m.

"Mr. Simpson had to leave for Scotland unexpectedly," Alice said quickly. "He told me that I was to refer any calls to you. He said you would understand about the Scottish piece, interviewing Mr. Wolfe and all. He said he would ring you."

She didn't understand and he didn't ring. Her anxiety about the Marquez piece disappeared in the havoc of a dozen other decisions about the type and photographs and cartoons. She didn't have time to panic. Occasionally she would notice herself taking action and review her decision peripherally. She was afraid that if she acknowledged her authority too directly, she might . . . actually she didn't know just what she was afraid of.

The Greer review still bothered her. Somehow it wasn't conclusive enough. She knew before she made the phone call that she shouldn't ask Hilary for advice.

Hilary exploded, "Sure, sure there are a lot of problems with 'feminist analysis', but Greer doesn't represent the whole Women's Movement. Just like every black prick doesn't represent African liberation."

"Oh, come on, Hilary. You can't possibly equate the oppression of women to the exploitation of the Third World. That really is going too far." She was almost shouting down the line. "Look, I've got to get back to work."

The last two days accelerated with the pressure of deadline against Harry's loose subbing. She grew more and more annoyed with him and then realised it wasn't fair. Harry was just distracted. Normally he was a great editor and the most political person she knew. He had gone through so much with the Communist Party in the 50's, no wonder he was a bit threadbare.

When he ambled into the office on Monday, Kathy settled for a modest admonition, "Harry, you know I had to make a decision about the Marquez piece."

"The Marquez . . . oh, yes. I think I tried to ring you back, but I was interrupted. Then Ethel made some emergency call. Sorry about that. I reckoned you were perfectly sensible. What did you tell him?"

"To take three extra days for the story. I wired £100 expenses."

"That's fine," he said as he walked into his office. He stuck his head back around the door, "Oh, I do have some questions about those columns in the front of the paper. The multiple review. I've told you before that this isn't an academic journal. I suppose it's too late now. Could you stop by the office on the way back from the printer's tonight? I'd like to talk over that promotion with you."

"I'm sorry, Harry, but I promised Craig a real supper tonight. It's our fifth anniversary." She tried to rationalize the sentimentality, but before she could come up with something that might satisfy Harry, he said,

"Neither of us will be able to afford supper if this mock-up isn't approved. Come on. I promise to give you a couple of days off at the end of this thing."

Damn. She thought she wasn't some functionary scurrying after a Christmas bonus. What did he think she was doing while he was in Scotland? Hang on. She would sound like Hilary in a minute. Hang on. The promotion *did* have to be done. Watch the bourgeois individualism. Hang on, Kathy. ▶

the day of judgement

promotion blurb ready this air. circulation report

They met for two hours that evening and she briefed him on last week's decisions. He reassured her that she had done as well as he could have done.

Craig was furious. He was having a hard enough time doing his research lately. When he borrowed time to spend with her, she could at least respect his schedule. As far as he could see, she was *always* having emergencies and he wondered — just wondered without being too analytical about it — how many of them were escapes from their shitty relationship. Since she didn't seem to find the occasion so portentous, he felt free to study and would return when dinner was ready. He wished her Happy Anniversary, by the way.

Salad making always soothed her. When she was little, the loveliest thing about getting married was going to be sitting in a blue tiled kitchen reaching into the cornucopia for another cucumber. She liked to score the cucumbers on the edges with a fork so that when she cut them they came out as unpredictably as paper dolls. (She and Craig were the best of their generation, the archetypal virile revolutionaries who might be photographed for marijuana advertisements in a few years. Bright. Confident, committed. He would finish his Ph.D. in psychology and they would take up his post in Havana. She would raise their kids in a healthy workers' state. But the order seemed to be breaking down. Kathy wasn't sure she wanted to quit her job. Craig let his thesis drag on another year. He never did anything overt to annoy her — that's why she felt it was her fault — it was what he didn't do. She couldn't count on him for anything. In the end, he didn't even do his own work. Maybe she put too much pressure on him.) Tomatoes were satisfying. If they were firm and fresh. She hated the over-ripe ones that sagged under the knife and squirted messily over the glistening chopping board. Raw mushrooms were best, falling into thin porous slices like wafers of fungus. The lettuce could be tedious when it was too wet. (She felt like a real bitch sometimes. She had to pry to learn what happened during his day. The conversation would be like an oral exam with halting, circumspect replies. Sometimes his withdrawal was an ambush. Like that weekend of the Third World Medical Conference. He insisted he wanted to go. Then on Thursday he announced that he still hadn't fixed the thermostats in the monkey room — Thursday! Her work schedule was ruined for two weeks. It was only afterwards she realised she might have gone alone.) Kathy carefully dried the leaves until they looked like heavy green tissue paper she used for collages when she was a child. Fun, all this cutting and reassembling. That's what she liked best — putting it all in order. She detested random salads — crisp stews in smudged glass bowls. First, she put in the bits of lettuce, then the celery, onion, mushrooms. She sprinkled rosemary and basil. On top she wheeled the tomatoes and the cucumbers. (Craig would understand once they had a chance to sit down and discuss the chaos at work. To be fair, she hadn't told him very much. She always got home so late. After the supper and the cleaning and the news, there was no time to talk.) The chops were sizzling and the potatoes were done just the way he liked them, with the jackets falling off.

"Craig," she called into the livingroom. "Craig."

No answer, so she set the hotplates on the stove and looked in. "Craig," she said gently. He was asleep at his desk, his head on a new Asimov science fiction book. "Craig," she said compassionately. This petulant boy was her protector and partner for life? "Craig," she said bitterly. She couldn't cope with the anger; she didn't know where to release it — at him — or at her own poor judgment. This is our anniversary, she told herself. She thought about the layouts she had to do tonight. She shook him, "Harry," she said and stopped. How often she almost had said that. It was eerie. How often she had mixed them up in dreams. And once, when she had promised Craig to deposit his grant in his chequeing account, she had put it in Harry's instead. She felt like such an idiot when the cashier showed her the numbers were different.

Craig looked up, "Who did you call?"

"Sorry, love, I'm always incoherent when I'm tired."

"Well, I'm too tired to indulge myself right now. I think I'll go off to a proper bed."

"But you haven't eaten. And it's our anniversary."

"I suppose you should have thought about both those items a little earlier. I'm worn out. See you in the morning." He stumbled up from the swivel chair, almost knocking over the half-empty bottle of sherry. She hungrily regarded the level, a sufficient ablution for guilt. She was grateful they still shared something.

Kathy awoke late with a terrible hangover. Not so much an alcoholic headache as a residue of remorse. She rose immediately, careful not to awaken Craig. She saw herself gazing into a cup of black coffee. Running to the tube. Answering the phones. What was she doing in London, her life was as illusory as Saint Ardie's.

"Hello, Kathy? This is Hilary. Got a news bulletin for you. Colson is coming down. Thought I should warn you that I got carried away with him yesterday. He was expounding on the vigour and genius of one Harry Simpson."

Kathy didn't say anything, too afraid to think what Hilary had said for her.

"Well, you know, kid, I'm not utterly indiscreet. I didn't let on that Harry was an absolute moron."

Kathy didn't know what bothered her more — Harry's fraudulence or her own complicity. Just how long did she think she could continue playing the innocent minion.

"What did you say to Colson?" she asked tentatively.

"Not much — I just dropped a few hints about Harry's long sojourns away from the office and his banker's hours. I reckoned the rest was up to you."

Kathy rang off and buzzed Harry's office. "Harry, I've got to talk to you."

"Sure, sure," he muttered. "And would you bring in those readership surveys. Also the circulation reports. Colson has decided to catch us off guard. This could mean the end of TA if we're not prepared."

She watched him take notes on her work. He tried, at first, to comprehend, but by one o'clock he was just grasping for details, for a semblance of competence. Harry hadn't made a straightforward judgement in months. What appeared to be his preoccupation with deadline was simply failed nerve. She had always responded discreetly, making her decisions sound like clerical minutiae. At the end of the day she told Harry that she wanted to be in on the conference. He was surprised, then agreed with alacrity. Of course, of course, it was a *sensible* idea.

The next morning, the fragrant and glossy mock-up arrived an hour before Colson was due. Kathy was proud of it all — the classic logo, the solid articles, the lively layout. It was so perfectly formed. She was as amazed and satisfied as Mary had been with her baby. And after last night, she might have to resign herself to this kind of posterity. She and Craig had never had such a row. It was more like a schism although it was just about the familiar issues — him charging that she spent too much time at work; her retorting that he felt jealous because he couldn't do his own work. He said she was a real career woman, all right, more career than woman. He told her she would have to make a choice, decide what she wanted. Kathy surprised both of them by saying she didn't know what she wanted and went to bed. Now, she looked forward to Colson's visit so much that she could hardly concentrate on the circulation figures.

Harry buzzed her on the intercom. "Great. Great. Just what I imagined. I really couldn't have done it without you."

What could you expect from Harry?

i

n the middle of the morning, a heavily cologned man in a grey striped suit and a thin paisley tie lumbered up to her.

"Harry Simpson, please," he blustered, his hand leaning heavily on her desk.

Before she had time to explain that Harry Simpson had a meeting this morning, the man added,

"My name is Colson. Carl Colson. I think Harry's expecting me." He pulled a wrinkled beige handkerchief from his back pocket and wiped his forehead, "Terrible stairs. Ever think of getting a lift installed?"

This was the visionary publisher they had been struggling to impress for two months? This was the man whose judgement would determine their jobs and the fate of *The Artisan*? She hadn't expected Leon Trotsky, but . . .

"Just one moment, please," she heard herself assuming the grace she had expected of him. How hollow did her voice sound? How contemptuous was her face? She watched him thanking her, taking a chair, smiling at her. She supposed she was smiling at him.

"Carl, Carl, welcome," Harry thrust his hand into the pudgy

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reviews

FILM

WIVES

Directed by Anja Brien
Scripted by Anja Brien
and the actors

Three wives take a couple of days off together from marriage. The film follows their spree and without ever resorting to tired polemics, it conveys innumerable reasons why we need a women's liberation movement. And it made me particularly aware of how cut off women, as wives and mothers, are from the ways and means of having a Good Time. Playing has become the prerogative of men and children with a few women allowed in strictly as playmates. But though I enjoyed the film it is sometimes so gentle and so understated that it appears vacuous or superficial.

Wives opens at a school reunion dinner; a speech is in progress with the speaker describing the "old girls" as married, married with children, or (smiling tactfully) Fancy Free. There's lots of laughter, lots to drink and eat, and singing of the old school song — but the event seems oddly subdued. Is it that we are so used to seeing male celebrations on the screen, full of raucous shouts and shattering glass, and by contrast these women remain quiet and responsible? They even clear up when the party is over. Or is it that the women exude a vague air of chances missed and squashed potential? They all repeat, "but then I got married . . .", "but then I had children and of course . . ." Superficially they are happy enough as they hand round photographs and reminisce, but something's wrong and it's a relief to leave with the *Wives* — Kaja, Mie and Heidrun.

These three, who were best friends in their schooldays, suddenly decide they want a break — a bit of fun before going home to husbands and children. It's never easy to have fun on demand but the dilemma is more acute for the three, because wives, mothers and pregnant women are not expected to "let rip", "break out" or "loosen around". What model do they have for a good time?



Wives Old Girls at a school reunion dinner

At first it seems that the only way they can relate to each other and their situation is to revert to their schooldays when enjoying themselves meant having fits of giggles. They link arms, laugh and determine to be carefree. But their adult female present intrudes and Mie suddenly confides that her husband is unfaithful and that in his eyes she has become part of the furniture, merging with the curtains. Heidrun inquires flatly, "Getting a divorce?" and Kaja asks briskly, "What pattern are they?" They don't want to know and neither do they want to confess or be reminded of their own problems. Years of isolation and competition as women stand between them.

It's not until they invade male territory that they begin to come together. Good-time places in the city — bars, night clubs, etc. — are for men. Women are present only as dates and prostitutes. The three are turned away from a night club and picked up in a bar.

At first they are pleased and excited to be picked up — that, theoretically, is *living*. Women after all are not supposed to have a good time with each other. However, it soon becomes clear that here too, having a good time is reserved for men and for women it

means being a sex object. They flee. But immediately they begin blaming each other for the fiasco, "whore", "prude".

Perhaps, if they are to enjoy themselves, the only answer is role reversal. So they hassle men in the street and comment on their looks, "Lovely beard", "Want a drink." It's fun at first — the men are terrified — but it soon palls.

Hunting or hunted, the only time they can begin to communicate in a relaxed way is when the "Homeguard", as they call themselves, repair behind their own lines. In the Ladies Lavatory, sitting shouting across the partitions, they can be themselves.

But that's public territory — it's a different story in private territory, Kaja's mother's home. The repressive forces are of a different order than those they meet in the male world outside. They cannot penetrate Kaja's mother's polite, passive gentility — the symptoms of years of conditioning as a wife. She smiles and smiles, they borrow the money they came for and make their escape.

Slowly the defences built during their years of isolation begin to crumble and they move from competition into confession. They open the curtains on their marriages and lifestyles revealing sex deaden-

ed by duty, violence, harassed husbands, childcare without nursery facilities, undermining financial dependence or dead end jobs with low pay, where management checks the calendar if you say you're absent with menstrual cramps.

Once they've "confessed" they are able to admit their need and affection for one another. There are no declarations, just an obvious concern for each other. They decide to take a boat trip, and squashed into a cabin they feed each other with drink and sweets bought to pacify children and husbands.

So why is it a sad film? Perhaps because three women moving through a sort of consciousness raising to solidarity isn't enough. A long shot of Heidrun walking by herself through some huge iron gates is a reminder of the constant threat of isolation. The rest of their classmates no doubt went home alone after the party with their self images intact and unhappiness hidden. There's no hint, no suggestion of the existence of the women's movement. It's hard to know how it could have been included without appearing like a moral tale — "they found feminism and lived happily ever after" — but without acknowledging that women are organising, the film with all its perceptiveness and subtlety remains up in the air.

Rosie Parker

BOOKS

THE PARADISE PAPERS
by Merlin Stone
(Virago, £4.95)

When I was asked to review Virago's latest publication, *The Paradise Papers* (The Suppression of Women's Rites), I felt dubious. All I knew was that it was about ancient goddesses, and I immediately suspected another addition to the myth of the "matriarchy" — the belief that there was once a time when women ruled in peace and plenty.

Broadly speaking, there are two "matriarchy" schools. The first, inspired by Engels and 19th century anthropologists, is pursued today by feminists such as Evelyn Reed. Communal social and economic life,

it's claimed, originally centred around women. But with the growth of private property and the centralised state, men seized power, imprisoning women in the nuclear family as their private servants and child-bearers. This version is accepted by some left groups who see the women's movement as secondary to the class struggle, since women will automatically be liberated again with the advent of socialism.

The other camp, represented by Elizabeth Gould Davis' *The First Sex*, comes to the opposite conclusion. It is socialism which is irrelevant; what's needed is the feminist overthrow of the chief enemy — man — and a return to the golden age of matriarchy.

Merlin Stone advocates neither of these solutions. Her aim is to show that the image of woman and the morality held to be "natural" and inevitable, in fact have their roots in a particular historical situation. This understanding may help towards building a society where men and women live together equally with mutual respect.

The book is far more exciting and provocative than I first imagined, and my initial scepticism about the existence of female deities was demolished. Merlin Stone argues that archaeologists have traced worship of goddesses as supreme creators of life and knowledge over the Near and Middle East from at least 7,000 BC until the closing of the last goddess temple in 500 AD.

According to her, they were worshipped in societies where women had power and freedom as descent and inheritance was matrilineal — that is, traced through the female line. The centres of social and economic life were the temples where the priestesses held sway. Merlin Stone suggests that matrilineal inheritance existed because ancient societies did not connect sex with reproduction: "Thus the concept of paternity and fatherhood would not have been understood."

She points out, however, that matrilineal descent does not equal political power; anthropological evidence of contemporary matrilineal societies shows us that even though political power and property are inherited through a woman, they are still administered by her male relatives. Yet the appeal of the "matriarchy" is strong, and she constantly slips over into implying that women held supreme power. Unfortunately, there is just not enough evidence for us to draw conclusions about women's position from the existence of a female

deity. Anthropological accounts of other societies, which point to the universality of women's subordination, should also make us wary of doing so.



Aphrodite, Roman period

Merlin Stone is on much firmer ground with her more limited conclusion that women's position in the goddess worshiping cultures was certainly better than in Biblical times, for which she produces ample evidence. For example, in the Sumerian state of Eshnunna where the goddess Innana was worshipped, laws written about 2,000 BC laid down that if a man raped a woman he should be put to death, while Hebrew law (1,000–600 BC) ordained that the victim of rape if single should be married to the rapist and if married or betrothed, the woman should be stoned to death.

From about 2,400 BC, northern invaders swept into the Near and Middle East, bringing with them their gods, which befitted their male dominated societies, and set about stamping out goddess worship. Merlin Stone suggests that the Hebrews themselves, particularly the Levites, the ruling priestly class who led the Hebrews into Canaan, were connected to these invaders. She uses Old Testament evidence to show that the crusade in the name of Jehovah waged against paganism, was in fact a ruthless attack on the indigenous Canaanite goddess.

This struggle was not merely ideological. To gain political control, it was essential to establish the principle of paternity in order to impose a male system of inheritance and political office — hence the campaign against women's sexual freedom which was exercised in the sacred temple

rites, and the enforcement of a double standard of morality for men and women.

Every means was used to discredit the old religion, including the fabrication of the Adam and Eve story (see *Spare Rib* 18). Here, the symbols of the goddess, the serpent and the tree, are denigrated along with sexuality itself as the sources of all evil. So unlike most "matriarchists", Merlin Stone describes the overthrow of women's power not in terms of disgruntled or ambitious male chauvinism, but as part of a particular power struggle.

A difficulty with the book is the way that her argument is presented. The absence of footnotes and references to her primary sources means that the laywoman needn't get bogged down in academia. But it also makes it impossible to assess the welter of fragmented historical, archaeological, mythological, linguistic, theological and ethnographic evidence used to support what are sometimes tentative conclusions.



Isis and Osiris. 550 BC, Egypt

Despite these, and other criticisms, I became involved in what for Merlin Stone is clearly a personal quest — almost a personal relationship — with the goddess in her many guises. It set me searching for Biblical maps, looking up the Old Testament, and thinking about ancient history.

It also made me realise how deeply embedded in Western culture are the conclusions of Adam and Eve. As Merlin Stone points out, this survives the secularisation of society, although Judeo-Christian mythology may have affected some of us more directly than we think through our parents' or grandparents' religious faith. But we must be careful not to set up other myths, such as that of matriarchy, to take its place.

Hermione Harris

SMALL CHANGES

by Marge Piercy

(Fawcett Publications, £1.05 + 20p postage from Compendium, 240 Camden High Street, London NW1)

Marge Piercy, author of *The Big Grand Coolie Dam* and a women's movement activist, brings her wide experience of American radical politics to this novel. We're transported back to the East Coast of 1969/70 — post flower-power, mid sexual revolution, just when women's liberation is stirring the continent.

The 'small changes' are mainly women's. Beth is a small-town wife who runs away and discovers a new world in Boston — a world of leftist men, healthfoods, multiple relationships and male-dominated communes. Marge Piercy writes quite subtly, and at times movingly about Beth's struggle to build a life in the midst of all this; along with some of her women friends she gradually develops aspirations to something better than either the bitter oppression of her marriage or the complacent chauvinism of the men around the sexually 'liberated' Boston scene.

Miriam, the other main female character, is less dogged than Beth and more generous — she dazzles. Her sexual and intellectual potency mean that she is more in demand by men. We follow her through hazardous love affairs with Phil and Jackson — in whom Piercy gives us convincing portraits of the kind of men who, despite their breathtaking sexism, we could, perhaps do, love. Interwoven with Miriam's progress from oppression by two men simultaneously to marriage with Neil (at whom Phil erupts "You don't want a woman, you want a fucking domestic staff, housekeeper, butler, nanny, pastrycook, gamekeeper, wine steward. Why don't you fuck a robot?") is Beth's setting up with her friends in a women's commune. The commune splits eventually because of personal and political tensions, several of the members go on to join a feminist theatre group.

It is through love for one of the originators of this group, Wanda, that Beth's long-repressed sexuality emerges, but almost before she comes to terms with loving another woman, the State intervenes. Wanda, the estranged wife of a Puerto-Rican activist, is subpoenaed by a Grand Jury — the scourge of the American left at the time — refuses to testify

and is jailed. Because of her lesbianism her parents get custody of her sons. Phil too does time for his activities in the anti-war movement.

For me, the strength of this book lies in the accuracy and feeling with which it delineates emotional and political predicaments faced by individuals caught up in particular historical struggles I identify with — against women's oppression, against the war in Vietnam, against the capitalist death culture.

Alison Fell

BREAST CANCER — A Personal History and an Investigative Report by Rose Kushner (Harcourt Jovanovich, £4.35)

When I was researching for the two articles I wrote on breast cancer (see *Spare Rib* 37, 42), I remember thinking that the whole complex subject really needed a book. Well, a book has now been written and it's exactly what I had in mind.

The discovery that she had breast cancer compelled Rose Kushner to find out the facts. Only then did she feel that she could make an informed decision about what treatment she should have, how and where it should be done, and who should do it. She shows how, unless women know what the possibilities are, we cannot make a real choice. In her own words, "To protect ourselves against careless and/or ignorant doctors, we ought to know what the best procedures are."

Ms Kushner examines the different kinds of surgery, drug therapy and radiotherapy, and the pros and cons of each. She investigates the kinds of pre- and post-operative tests that should be performed (with particular emphasis on the latter where she finds that there is much ignorance). She highlights the need for the availability of long-term psychotherapeutic help and questions society's blanket acceptance of the Pill's 'safety' as far as breast cancer is concerned. Moreover, she writes about what it *feels* like . . . to discover you have the disease . . . the low points, and even the high points.

This book can give thousands of women courage, support and hope, not only in facing the possibility or the reality of a frightening disease, but also in our dealings with doctors. While the book appears to be solely about breast cancer, it is also in fact about the politics of health care. Relying for the backbone of the book on her

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

THE MAGIC JACKET

by Nicholas Brennan
(Kestrel, £2.50)

Jennie is wearing a jumble sale blazer. The blazer is magical and grants Jennie's every wish, like "I wish I didn't have to go to school" — so the school collapses; and "I wish I'd seen that happen" so the school re-assembles only to fall down again.

Nicholas Brennan has filled this simple and exciting idea with plenty of action and detail. The large pages are teeming with incidents, not only Jennie turning into a duck, elephant, milk bottle, cat and bird, but each situation meticulously imagined and drawn. This is an engrossing picture book with its close-ups of brickwork as interesting as the aerial views of urban back streets above which the metamorphosing Jennie lurches. And it is good to find a girl the central character of such fantastical happenings.

Andrew Mann, Children's Rights Workshop



own experiences and those of other women, she provides us with a totally demystified account of the subject, from the woman's point of view. The facts are never censored, and they are sometimes unpalatable. But by finding out the facts, Rose Kushner was able to face her situation. She was also able to obtain the best treatment possible, and shows by example how other women can support each other to do the same. She even got herself better treatment than Betty Ford, wife of the US President, who was

bundled into a general hospital and given a radical mastectomy by two surgeons, neither of whom specialised in breast disease (read the book to understand the full, horrific implications of this).

Rose Kushner has done the rest of us a great service by sharing her hard-won knowledge, for all of us are potential or actual victims of breast cancer. Ms Kushner has done the research: it's up to us to use it.

Jill Rakusen

A VERY LONG WAY FROM ANYWHERE ELSE

by Ursula Le Guin
(Gollancz, £2.25)

FOREVER . . .

by Judy Blume
(Gollancz, £2.95)

We associate Ursula Le Guin's name with wizards and galaxies so it is a surprise to see it on the cover of a novel about teenagers for teenagers set in the 'real' world. Bereft of dragons, what can this fantasy writer of distinction (the *Earthsea* trilogy) do for today's teenager?

Natalie is a talented musician who wants to be a composer. She realises that composing has not been a fruitful field for female endeavour; and she is likely to encounter prejudice. Owen wants to be a scientist but is afraid to excel beyond his parents' horizons. The book revolves around the relationship between these two very clever young people. It is Natalie's intellectual strength and purpose that reassures Owen that it's OK to be clever and their loving friendship is the first he has ever had. But what does the cerebral teenager do about sex? Owen feels obliged to try out the male sexual clichés of his peers and he almost blows the whole thing. Le Guin is sympathetic to the white middle-class's brightest children but her focus is ultimately narrow and uncritical.

Judy Blume's books have not until now been published in Britain — it was felt that British teenagers were not "sophisticated" enough for them. The publication here of *Forever . . .* is thus very welcome since it at last allows us access to one of the most honest writers for young people today, and it deals unabashedly with teenage sexuality.

Blume's white suburban 17-year-olds, Katherine and Michael, are nice people with nice understanding parents and they have a nice relationship that ends up in bed. Blume is explicit about the sex act, and since the book is from the girl's point of view, about her sexuality in particular. But does good sex mean that a relationship is "forever"? Blume has the courage to say no.

If Katherine and Michael's story has a faint whiff of case history about it, Blume's warmth and concern is very much in evidence. Young people will enjoy this book for 13-year-olds and upwards.

Rosemary Stones
Children's Rights Workshop

Sexism in Children's Books
Facts, figures & guidelines



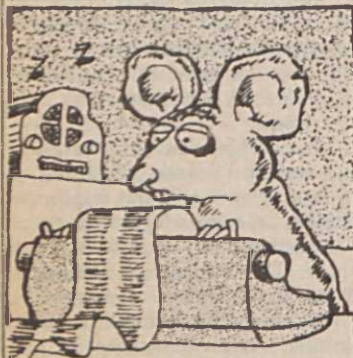
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MUSIC
STREET DEATH

Street Life, a fortnightly radical music paper, collapsed in June after the 17th issue. The money supplied by its mystery backers mysteriously dried up. The agreements turned out to be either non-existent or worthless. The staff are fighting to get even a portion of redundancy pay and looking rather hopelessly for new jobs.

But in nine months, its ex-music press staff, mainly from Sounds, had a unique chance to explore new ways of presenting music and politics. We asked Penny Valentine (contributing editor) and Mike Flood-Page (senior editor) how they used that freedom and how far it really went.

Penny: There was one woman full-timer out of eight, and four regular women freelancers. I wouldn't honestly say we had worked out a feminist approach, at least to start with. If I came up with an idea, it would get through cos I'd scream and yell during the editorial meetings. And the women writers would get into huddles. But once we had started approaching music in a more all-encompassing way, it affected how we wrote about women. The coverage of women was slowly building and we were becoming quite a force editorially, but it was only just underway.

Mike: We weren't like the straight rock press. We were neither exploitative ("Look at this sexy woman") or patronising ("Isn't it good she can play a guitar"). We wanted to look at the whole lives of women artists in their own terms. Penny: The music press wouldn't acknowledge what had been happening. All the women singers/musicians coming out of America were just seen as individuals. They just filtered through one by one. It was never linked to the changing position of women in general. In the States women have been able to strengthen their position within the male dominated music world. It's important to ask how and why they did it, not just look at their stage act and latest record. I interviewed British women musicians about why this wasn't happening here. I found them very relieved to be able to talk about themselves.

It seems stupid that people don't write more about women and music. It's like saying no woman in the whole of England listens to the radio or hears music and that those women



making music don't count. But these women are writing out their own consciousness through their lyrics and other women are picking up on that. Mike: I don't think the women's movement or the left realise how much music is the way people think things through. Everyone's got some records, everyone switches on the radio. It's not just a question of boosting what is radical, you have to confront the contradictions in culture, fair and square between the eyes. Like, why does Paul McCartney write 'Silly Love Song' which really idolises a notion of love which can't exist. Or why is soul music from Philadelphia so enormous. Cos all that brotherly love and being a slicked up dude and racial harmony goes with the failure of black militancy. Or look at the contradiction between Joni Mitchell's feminist strength and what's retrograde in her music, that very wealthy, literally suburban mentality.

In *Street Life's* reviews, the question became not should you buy this record, but what does it mean. And the answer was frequently more questions. You just got further away from the product itself. Whereas the music press's main concern is, "Is X going to be successful or not? Or do they have some outrageous gimmick?" But wasn't *Street Life's* apparent freedom an illusion? Penny: We never really had

control over what, in the end, mattered — money. We had a tremendous amount of editorial freedom but we were still employees. We were handed a structure, a format and a lot of money. It wasn't a bunch of people sitting down saying "Let's do it." That's why it took six months staggering before we really got going. Mike: But I believe what we were trying to do did work. We brought together a range of subjects and kept our principles intact and our politics strong but implicit. There's a real hunger for a music-based paper that is political and readable at the same time.

Street Life's fate illustrates the harsh choice which faces any radical journal. A genuinely independent magazine faces a constant and draining effort just to stay in print. Coupled with the conservatism of the retail trade, readership seems to stay pathetically small for all the effort. *Street Life's* operation, an initial print order of 120,000 and an expenditure of £175,000, is in the big league. But for all the editorial rope they had to play with, they could still be hung at the whim of an Island speculator.

David Widgery and
Marion Fudger

Apologies to Stef Pixner who interviewed Peggy Seeger in issue 48 and wasn't credited.

Backstreet abortions in the 1950s

“Most of us had 3 or 4”

Agnes Marchant's daughter Susan wrote to Spare Rib and suggested that an interview with her mother would bring home to people the reality of abortion in the 1940s and 50s — a reality that could so easily return.

Rosie Parker went to meet Agnes and Susan, nervously expecting to hear harrowing stories of knitting needles, blood poisoning, etc. Instead she learned about an entire underworld of women's lives. A world secretly condoned by the law and the medical profession when it suited them, and brought into being by women's courageous determination to control their own fertility at any cost.

● *What did you do when you decided that you wanted an abortion?*

Agnes: In those days (1951) the problem was not knowing where to go. It wasn't a matter of 'Oh, alright I can go to so-and-so.' You had to be careful who you asked. There were two abortionists in the block of flats where I lived, but I didn't dare go to them though I knew they did it as they'd both got arrested. In fact one had got two years. When she came out she was at it again, but you couldn't knock on her door because she'd tell everybody, 'Guess who knocked on my door.'

● *So you didn't want people to know that you'd had an abortion.*

Agnes: Oh no. It's only now that the law's changed that you can talk about it, and you realise how many did have illegal abortions. People are so much freer now — they can please themselves, can't they. In those days you felt such a hypocrite; you were leading two lives. You couldn't tell anyone at work what was happening to you. You felt really lonely. In the end I spoke to my sister and she said she knew someone.

● *Why did you want an abortion?*

Agnes: I was engaged but I didn't want to rush into marriage. But even if I'd got married the next week, I didn't want children.

Anyway, I went to this woman with my sister. I paid her £10 and she used a syringe and soapy water. Have you ever seen one? They are sold in chemists as enema syringes. There's a long tube with a ball in the middle and nozzle on the end where the water goes in and fills up the ball. You've only got to get an air bubble in and whoosh! you're gone, aren't you.

I've never known anyone who had it come off first time with a syringe. I had to go back to the woman three or four times and pay her another £5 before it came off.

● *Was it very painful?*

Agnes: I was working when I got symptoms. It started at 7 o'clock one evening. I was haemorrhaging and losing blood clots. Then 24 hours later the thing came away. It was the first abortion I'd had and I thought, 'Well, that wasn't too bad.' But I had pretty awful pain, mind.

● *Did you think of going to a doctor when the pain got bad?*

Agnes: Oh no, oh no. They'd send you straight into hospital where they would try and save it — prop your legs up and give you a few injections. I never went into hospital but I knew people who did and they were given a really rough time by the law. The police would stand by your bed and keep on at you, 'Who did it? Tell us who did it and we'll get your money back for you.'

● *Did they ever charge the woman who had had the abortion?*

Agnes: They'd never have got a conviction.

What was the average sentence passed on an abortionist?

Agnes: It varied from 18 months to five years. It depended on what the charge was or if a woman had had previous convictions.

● *You had a second abortion?*

Agnes: Yes, the next time I got pregnant my daughter Susan was five and I was divorced and I thought, 'Oh God, I can't...' I was pretty desperate. I was on my own and I knew I couldn't possibly manage another. Anyway, this was in 1958, when I had a young doctor who was quite good. He gave me some tablets and said, 'If you're not pregnant this will bring on your period.' I took them. Nothing happened. I went back and he said, 'Well, it's obvious that you are pregnant. There's nothing I can do, but there are one or two people around...'

He mentioned somebody's name. I'd heard of this particular woman and thought that she was wary who she entertained because she'd been arrested a few times. And I'd heard she used knitting needles. 'No, she doesn't,' the doctor said, that's just gossip. She uses a syringe and she's quite good. Once it happens, once it comes off, you can call me in and I'll come. I don't mind cleaning up, you know.'

● *You went to the woman he suggested?*

Agnes: Yes. No-one knew I was going. If anything had gone wrong she could have just dumped me and nobody would have known. She was — God, she must have been about 70 years old. She had all these Catholic pictures on the walls; big old-fashioned pictures of Our Lord with the lamb and the crook, pictures of the Lady of Lourdes, and rosaries and palm crosses draped everywhere.

She said, 'Well, it's expensive dear.' So I said, 'Look, all I've got is £30.' 'Alright,' she said, 'I'll do it.' Later I discovered that she did it for other people for £5.

Her house was none too clean and a bit musty smelling. You sat in a funny, dirty-looking armchair and put your leg over the arm so that she could get into your vagina with the syringe.

Afterwards I waited 12 hours (it comes off within 12 to 24 hours after being syringed) but nothing happened. Altogether I went back to her about seven times.

● *How pregnant were you?*

Agnes: Oh, I ended up about three and a half months pregnant. I knew she wasn't really trying so I finally said, 'Look, if you can possibly try and do it I'll see you alright again. I haven't got any money but I'll get some by the end of the week.' Then, as I walked home, so this soapy water started to come away from me. This had never happened before so I

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A 23-year-old woman died from an illegal £40 abortion carried out with the stem of a plastic flower, said Mr Brian Watling, prosecuting at the Old Bailey yesterday. Miss Pamela Slater died from gross septicaemia after soap and water had been injected into her through the stem.

Mrs Sheila Hoyte (49) of Shaftesbury Road, Finsbury Park, London, was gaoled for seven years after she had admitted unlawful killing.

In 1967 she had been sentenced to three years imprisonment for causing the death of a woman by carrying out a similar abortion.

Mr Watling said that the dead woman visited her doctor but he thought she was a borderline case as far as a legal termination was concerned. Miss Slater discussed her pregnancy with her sister and Mrs Orlebar arranged for them both to go to Mrs Hoyte's home on November 10. When the soap and was injected Miss Slater with pain.

In France there were as many abortions each year as births before abortion was legalised

1966 — Home Secretary estimates that there are 100,000 illegal abortions every year

Before the 1967 Abortion Act: 1938 — 600 women die from illegal abortion

1960 — 62 women die from illegal abortion

Both about a third of true figures as deaths from illegal abortion not reported for fear of a police investigation

After the 1967 Abortion Act: 1973 — 12 deaths from abortion

Dr J. M. Slattery, a 47-year-old Jesuit-educated Irish GP, has told us that before the present Abortion Act he was called on to treat an emergency, septic abortion case approximately once every 10 days. Such cases required admission to hospital, blood transfusions, and operation under anaesthetic. Even so, the women involved often suffered the severe pelvic inflammation that can be followed by permanent sterility. At best, it was an expensive experience. At worst, it was fatal.

Dr Slattery also said: "I don't want to see that again. The Abortion Act has been the most important, impressive, and most useful piece of social legislation in my lifetime."

Since the abortion law was changed, Dr Slattery has been called on to treat only one septic abortion case. "In hospitals, before the war, I saw married women with fractures and other injuries that they had sustained

thought, well, at least it's penetrated the womb. Before it had just acted like a douche.

Anyway, the next day I woke up with a slight show. I went to work and started to feel a bit queasy. I came home and it came off that night. I didn't have as much pain with that one as I did with the one when I was six and a half weeks pregnant, funnily enough. I had pain for only about two or three hours before the thing came away. Then I thought, well I'll go to bed, but I was frightened to lie down because I felt I'd die if I did. So I propped myself up all night and with the slightest movement of my body I felt all this blood coming away from me. It was, you know, quite frightening.

The next morning, feeling a bit light-headed, I went to the doctor and he gave me a vitamin shot and some medicine.

● *Did the woman you went to earn her living by giving abortions?*

Agnes: Yes, she used to go out to people — mostly to the West End where girls had plenty of money. This particular old lady, she told me — but whether it was boastful bragging I don't know — she said that she'd been to Belgium and Switzerland to perform abortions. She made a small fortune during the war performing abortions for Americans. She got arrested, thanks to a girl who had it done and had just got to the top of the street when the police picked her up. 'Come on,' they said, 'just take us back and show us the house you went into and we'll get your money back.' She got 18 months. The local police knew what was going on and she was left alone for quite a while. If she'd stuck to her rich clients she would have been OK — she used to go to their flats. But when she started taking in anyone who knocked on her door...

● *Were there women you knew who gave themselves abortions?*

Agnes: One or two girls I knew said they had done it themselves, but those particular girls couldn't even insert a tampon.

● *Did your friends' husbands disapprove of their wives having abortions?*

Agnes: They didn't like it. Usually they didn't know. So while you are going through the process of the thing coming away and you had pains in your tummy, you had to put on a good front and pretend you were OK.

● *I suppose many women had children simply because they were scared of having an illegal abortion?*

Agnes: Oh yes, no end, because it was frightening. They (the abortionists) didn't tell you what was going to happen. They'd syringe the woman, she would go off, come back if nothing happened, go off again and if she didn't come back the abortionist would think that she was (a) dead, or (b) OK. They never bothered to explain about the afterbirth or anything. Imagine someone home on their own with all that going on.

● *Were you worried about the notion that abortion was taking a life?*

Agnes: Quite honestly, we never even thought about it, it never crossed our minds that we might be taking a human life. Up to a few years ago nobody thought about that — I didn't and I'm sure none of my friends did. It was just a thing there that they didn't want. Anyway I don't think it is taking a human life — people are only bringing this forward now.

Another thing they are trotting forward is the psychological damage caused by abortion. Well, you might get one or two neurotic girls but if abortion really did cause psychological damage, we — my generation — would all be in the nut-house because we didn't have just one or two, most of us had three or four. Today, with better contraception, girls usually have just one and it's all laid on the line for them, they go in, they go out and it's all done for them. We had to go around looking for somebody and there was all the aggravation of going backwards and forwards, and the worry . . . Yes, if it did upset you psychologically all my generation would be raving lunatics.

Susan: What frightens me about these people who are trying to make abortion illegal is the thought of having to go through what my mum went through. I think every child should be a wanted child. I wasn't wanted and my mum had an awful struggle moneywise.

Agnes: Yes, but I was in love with your father — still am. If I was going to have a kid I'd want his.

Susan: But you must admit it was inconvenient.

Agnes: Oh, goodness me, yes. I tried for a couple of months to get rid of Susan until the women I went to said, 'No, I can't . . .' But once I'd made up my mind that I couldn't get rid of her, I got on with it. I'm glad I did, of the three I'd have preferred to have her. The others were probably boys — they always say boys come away easier than girls.

Susan: It's understandable. In her situation I'd go for a legal abortion now.

Agnes: When Susan was younger, I used to say to her, 'Look, if ever you get pregnant, don't go and tell your friend's mum or aunt — come to me. Don't go off and buy this and take that when you don't know what's in it.' I knew of cases where people died through taking things.

● *Taking what things?*

Agnes: There were little chemists that sold you pills and things. You'd tell the chemist that you were overdue and he'd say, 'Oh dear, one minute, see if this will help you,' and he'd sell you this pill. You couldn't just go to any chemist, but you'd hear word o' mouth who would help you out. There was one quite near where we lived and my sister bought a tiny pill for half a crown from him in 1953. She took the pill and had this

terrific haemorrhage for about two or three days — the toilet was absolutely filled up with blood. Then that packed up and she thought she had miscarried. A fortnight later the haemorrhage started again for three or four days, but she was still pregnant and had the baby after all.

Then there was a friend of mine who took quinine. She drank the stuff by the bottle and today she is almost blind. It didn't help — she had to go and have an abortion afterwards.

Susan: It was all so unnecessary. The men don't understand. They think that if abortion laws are tightened that the problem is going to disappear — that women aren't going to get pregnant. But the problem was always there — people just died quietly in a corner and nobody ever knew it was for an abortion.

Agnes: Yes, they went off and died and nobody mentioned it, or the family would say, 'She died of peritonitis.' So, if it's made illegal again . . .

Susan: Or even if it's tightened up . . .

Agnes: If it's tightened up it's going to give all those crooks scope again. You're going to have all the backstreet abortionists in business again, aren't you.

Susan: Yes, I used to live in a flat over the back of Brixton and my next-door neighbour had girls trooping up, mostly on Sunday afternoons. Nothing was said, but people like her are waiting for trade to pick up if the law goes backwards. □

fiction continued..

mit of Carl Colson. "Sorry, I had no idea you were waiting. How long have they kept you here?" He ushered him inside. She waited demurely for her invitation, but Harry didn't even turn around to nod before he shut the door.

"Well, well," she heard him say to Colson, "What do you think of my baby? How about the logo, eh?"

She couldn't endure the thought of them sitting in the large office congratulating each other. She went out to the loo to wash her face. When she came back, she was still flushed and her copy of the magazine was gone.

"They've taken it in," said Alice delicately. "They said they didn't want anything to happen to it."

What goddam arrogance. It was her sweat, her work. What absolute nerve!

She heard the intercom buzz.

Perhaps she had been too rash. Perhaps they had just expected her to follow them in. Perhaps she should just go in now and save the formality of answering the line. No, she would wait for them to ask her. She deserved that much.

"Kathy, I was wondering if you could do us a favour?"

"Sure, I'll be right in."

"No need to trouble yourself. Could you just ask Alice — her line seems to be broken — could you just ask Alice to bring us two cups of sugared tea?"

"Sure, Harry. Sure."

She rotely relayed the message and watched Alice prepare the tea, place it on a tray with some digestives and take it in. Suddenly, Kathy felt nothing but the pure release of acrimony. She was too angry to be intimidated, too angry for judgement. Kathy got up and banged on the door.

She was greeted by an astonished Alice, carrying an empty tray in one hand and a stack of file folders in the other. Kathy smiled and quickly walked past into the office.

"I've finished that work, Harry. I can come in now."

"Yes, yes, Mrs. Edwards," expanded Colson. "Do come in. Harry tells me you're such a bright girl, with drive and personality." Colson brightened, "Harry says you're his right hand."

"Sorry to inform you about the amputation."

"I beg your pardon?" asked Colson.

"This girl's got a great sense of humour, Carl, just one of the things I haven't told you about her." Harry smiled indulgently. When Kathy didn't smile back, Harry stuttered for a transition.

Kathy interceded, "I'm thinking about leaving the paper, going back to a job in Birmingham, unless some important changes are made."

Harry sat still.

"But, but," sputtered Colson. "This is a silly time for that, my love. I mean just when *The Artisan* has been reborn. This mock-up is brilliant. And to think we were all so afraid of failure."

"And of success."

"What was that, my dear?"

"Listen, this is a good start, but only that. We could have much more direct reporting from South America and Africa, a broader review policy." She knew she wasn't talking to either of them, but enjoying the rush of her own ideas.

"A wider circulation in the North, some hard investigative pieces — like a series on multinationals."

"That's all very well, but hang on, girl, and look at what Harry's done for a moment. The multiple review is superb; the Marquez piece is a real coup."

She had no reason to expose Harry now. He and Colson could find out about each other. "Look, I'll outline the ideas. You can think about them. If you agree, I'll stay and help. If you don't, I've got another job waiting. I suppose political commitment is portable."

They turned to Harry. "Yes," he said wearily, "they sound like good ideas. Perhaps we could discuss them after lunch?"

"Well, well," said Colson brightly, glancing quickly at his watch, "of course we're open to change. Just look at this issue. The mark of a real revolutionary editor."

"I know," said Kathy, retrieving her copy and walking out the office. □

Sole copyright of the stories from the Women Writers Collective remains with the individual authors.



Chinese Women

▲ Girls chat in the grounds of Ban Bu Museum in Siano, a neolithic village which has been preserved.



▲ Sold as a child bride, illiterate, Wang Shao Ti used to live the life of a menial in the home of her in-laws. Now she can read and write, works in a factory near Shanghai and is involved in the community; domestic work is shared with her husband and family.

In Parts One and Two of our series, *Suki Colegrave* described the ways in which she feels women in China are still oppressed and exploited today, and criticised the Chinese Communist Party for suppressing women's spontaneous demands for equality.

Delia Davin, who has lived and worked in China for several years, replies to the criticisms and presents a very different view. The photographs were taken by *Sally and Richard Greenhill*.

In Peking I have often argued against the suspicion that the women's movement in the West is generally anti-man and irrelevant to a real revolutionary movement. How ironic that back here I should find it necessary to argue within the women's movement that the Chinese Communist Party is not anti-woman and that the general revolutionary movement in China is vitally relevant to women's liberation.

Our Party

The women whom I knew and with whom I worked in Peking talked about "our Party". They didn't see it as a male-dominated organization constantly holding women back or sacrificing their interests to other priorities, or even as a paternalistic one carrying out a few limited reforms. Are we then to conclude that they are the dupes of the Chinese Party? That seems to me the logic of Suki Colegrave's position, but it is surely a rather arrogant one.

Ordinary Chinese women support the Party and work for the revolution because they can see what it has done, and is doing for the masses of whom they are a part. Yes, production is a priority in China and one to which sacrifices have sometimes to be made. The reason is very simple. China is still a poor, third world country, and if standards of living are to go up, productivity has to be raised fast.

Inequalities give rise to Debate

Colegrave quotes from Chou En-lai on the existence of "gaps and failures in China's policy towards women". In fact these are quite generally recognised. Chairman Mao said in an interview in 1970 that it was not possible to achieve complete equality at the moment. This is wholly consistent with the line of the Chinese Communist Party that inequalities will continue until the period of building socialism is over. This should not be seen simply as an ingenious let-out, it is a recognition of certain inescapable realities.

There are statements in Suki Colegrave's article with which I disagree but won't attempt to argue here in detail, because I want to stick to the points I think most important. The first of these is that the question of women's position and the problems of women's liberation are still very much matters for debate in China. For example, Suki Colegrave makes attacks on unequal pay for equal work, on a division of labour which tends automatically to give the men heavier and better-remunerated jobs and on the belief (held not only by some men but also by some women) that women are too weak for certain tasks. These are all criticisms which I have heard made, and hotly debated, in China. Though nobody believes that the unfairness of the situation can necessarily be remedied overnight, all recognise that progress has been and still is being made. Those who think that greater speed is possible press for it, and in doing so struggle with those who think more caution necessary or whose actual level of consciousness is lower.

Balancing Priorities

What are the difficulties of going ahead faster? All over China all sorts of inequalities still survive: between town and countryside, between different regions, some being better endowed by nature than others, and between one agricultural commune or one industrial enterprise and another, some being more productive than others.

These inequalities will continue for a long time because they can only be eliminated as China reaches a very advanced stage in the construction of socialism. To try to effect great equality now would actually mean reducing standards of living for workers in the advanced sectors of the economy and would diminish the incentives to workers in the poorer sectors to advance by their own efforts. These negative consequences can

be avoided only by bringing equality about gradually, as the political understanding of the people grows.

Like other inequalities, economic inequality between the sexes is being slowly reduced. In the countryside for example, much work still requires great physical strength. Women, (and incidentally weaker or older men) may not be allocated such work, or they may get less of it done when they are. Either way they will earn less. Or, as is the case in the model agricultural brigade of Tachai¹, they may do fewer hours on the land per day and receive 8½ points to a man's 10. They then spend more time on housework and on childcare.

Beginning to Socialise — and Share — Housework

However much of what used to be women's work is now done on a larger scale outside the home by workers who receive workpoints for what they do. For example, there are kindergartens, sewing stations, canteens and noodle-making plants.

There are of course restrictions to the rate at which these can be developed. All these enterprises require capital and must pay wages. The money for them can only be found if the time of the housewife freed by their creation can be used to increase production. But in the Chinese countryside where labour is usually plentiful, while capital and land are short, it takes time to absorb extra labour. Furthermore, canteens have not proved very popular in the rural areas. Most peasants still prefer to eat at home except in the rush harvest seasons.

How will the situation eventually change? Well, it is changing all the time and will continue to do so as the people are ready for it. In the late 1960s and early 1970s came the development of the "Iron Girls' teams" in the countryside. The members, teenage girls for the most part, reckoned that they could do as much work as any man in a day. They proved this by doing it, and thus went on to equal earnings. When such women marry, in their mid-twenties, they may slacken off a bit during their child-bearing years, but they would certainly resist becoming mere earners of pin-money and taking on all the housework. In fact, one of the most striking changes I noticed in China after an absence of ten years was that men did far more work in the home. This was especially the case in the towns, where differences in earning power between the sexes tend to be smaller,

1. See Chinese Women in Spare Rib 49.

▼ Middle-school pupils in Peking at work wiring circuits for cars in their own small factory.



but was also noticeable in the countryside. It has, incidentally, the full support of the Party and therefore the powerful influence of the media behind it. Women also frequently challenge the men to competitions to see who can do "light" jobs like picking tea or cotton faster, and, when they win, use this to push their rating up.

There are other long-term factors which will work in women's interests. The decline in the birth-rate brought about by a concerted birth-control campaign which aims at establishing a two-child family as the norm, will reduce both the time that women have to spend on child-bearing and rearing and the toll that it takes of their health and strength.

The drive to mechanise agriculture within the decade which was launched in the autumn of 1975, should raise agricultural productivity and make it less dependent on physical strength.

Housewives' Cooperatives

In the cities it is true that although the state factories employ both men and women, the employees of street factories and mainly women. As they are labour-intensive, the street factories have low productivity levels, pay less and cannot give fringe benefits.

To understand them we must go into their history. They began as "housewives cooperatives" started by unskilled and often illiterate women who wanted to work and to make their contribution to building up the country but for whom there

▼ Li Su Ching works in the office of the Wuhan Song and Dance Academy. The Academy needed photography so she learnt to use a camera in her spare time, and now takes whatever pictures are needed.



were no jobs in state industry. They pooled whatever equipment they could get hold of and started work. A common pattern would be for such a group to begin by making clothes on a sewing machine owned by one of its members and gradually to build up their equipment with the profits until they might start producing say, buttons, or transistor radio components. The women who work in them thus gain a limited amount of money, experience, company, self-confidence, an ability to take initiatives and a higher level of literacy, for such enterprises usually organise educational classes. If we recall that in 1949 when the People's Government was established, between one third and one half of Chinese men were literate against under 5% of women, it is perhaps easier to understand the necessity for this. The most successful of these factories finally get taken over by the state, which invests in them, and raises wages and benefits to the normal level for state factories. Since the state has limited resources this must be done in a planned and gradual way.

Obviously if the system automatically streamed male school-leavers into well-paid jobs in state factories and female ones into the poorer street factories it would be sad. But this is not how things work. School-leavers of either sex go only very rarely into street factories. They employ mainly women who were formerly without paid employment. As an ad hoc measure to solve the problems of this generation of women they are fine.

Ease and Self-Confidence

I remember the shining eyes of a woman agricultural brigade leader, still only in her twenties, as she described how she had struggled against the prejudice of both men and women when she first took up her post.

The calm, beautiful expression of a woman in her eighties who had joined the Red Army in 1928 recalling the physical and mental torture which had been inflicted on her under the old marriage system and which had driven her to flight. The tears which ran down the cheeks of a grandmother as she told of the binding and crippling of her feet in the interests of "beauty", and the almost incredulous pity on the face of her grand-daughter, an engineer in a truck factory, who jiggled her baby on her knee as she listened. The economy of movement with which a woman first-year student at a languages institute handled her spade and the nonchalance with which she far outstripped her teachers and fellow-students, men and women alike, as they dug a vegetable storage pit. Questioned, she laughed and explained that she had spent her three years since secondary school living in tents and working on railway construction sites.

When I think of my colleagues, I think of the uncertainty of some middle-aged women who said that although theoretically they thought men and women equally capable, they felt that they had aged faster than their husbands and so they always left the heavy jobs like laudering sheets to them. I think of the pleasant non-competitive relations between the women in the office for they were not under pressure to bid for the attention of men. The ease and self-confidence with which they could live, work and love because they were not bound to catch a man, exhibit his wealth and status, or attempt to retain his affection by forever striving to attain some commercially imposed ideal appearance. The men, striving to reject the sexist ideology they had grown up with, not always succeeding of course, any more than the women did, but trying at least. Often accepting a woman as a superior without appearing to find it a problem. The look on my daughter's face when for the first time she saw women driving buses. The woman who had a suction abortion, early, on her own demand without administrative fuss and was back at work the next day, well and at ease with herself.



▲ Railway worker near Wuhan. Workers run the train as a team and make cooperative decisions about running schedules, cleaning and servicing.

Sense of Direction

There are still many levels of consciousness amongst women in China. Many levels of achievement, plenty of surviving inequalities, lots of problems. China is still poor, her people are poor, and this means a lot of hard work, relieved by simple pleasures but few luxuries for men or women.

What I've tried to put across in the thumbnail sketches above, and indeed in all of what I have written is the sense of purpose, of moving forward, and of potential which is so important in the lives of Chinese women today. Not all of them have realised Chairman Mao's words: "Times have changed. What men can do women can also do", but all, to some extent at least have had their lives transformed by the revolution behind these words. It is a transformation of great diversity and vitality, impossible to do more than touch on in these few pages, but I regard it as one of the greatest achievements of the Chinese revolution — which has most certainly been a revolution of both men and women.□

"It is not easy for Western feminists to get authentic information about the changes in the status of women brought about by the Chinese Revolution . . . Katie Curtin's book is the best brief treatment of the subject I've yet seen."

Evelyn Reed, author of *Women's Evolution*

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children

creche do Vimieiro

"Help make our creche a reality"

Vimieiro is a region of the rural Alentejo area of Portugal, 150 km. south of Lisbon. In February 1975 workers occupied the privately-owned, uncultivated land there and began to farm it, forming themselves into twelve agricultural cooperatives; these have now federated into one Union and give employment to 180 women and 220 men. The Union recently occupied and reconstructed an old flour mill, which now also houses a bakery, offices and repair workshops.

For the first time, women here have employment for the whole year round, the same rights as other workers, and three months maternity leave. But their wages are still below the male rate and their domestic load is as crushing as ever — women still bear the entire burden of responsibility for child-care and housework:

'I wake up at 5am. I have two daughters at school, and my mother who's over 60. I have to leave something ready for mum, otherwise she has to do everything alone. I prepare the lunch I'll take to work, wash dishes, give the house a quick brush, see to the animals and go to work. At 6.30pm when it's almost dark I come home with my body worn out. What can I hope to do afterwards? Nothing. This is women's life — wake up, work, back home, bed at night, next morning work. We don't even know what a cafe is, we don't know what anything is.'

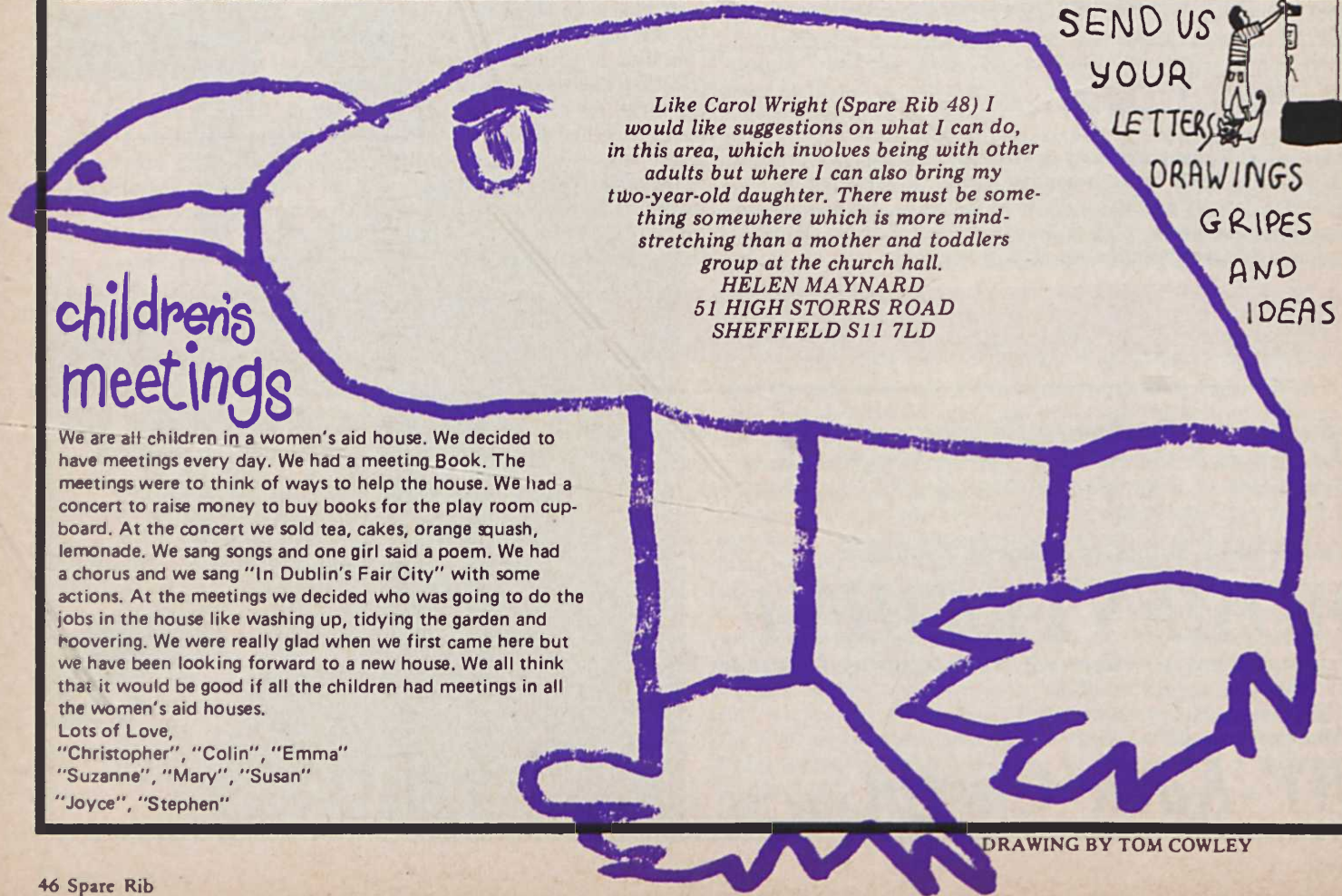


Since many of the women agricultural workers find that up to a third of their weekly wage goes on paying baby-minders, and that this isn't always a reliable form of childcare, they have decided that, for Vimieiro, a creche is a priority. Some of them formed a group to search for premises, and found a large old house which needs extensive repair work; the creche will also need furniture, toys, etc. At the moment the women are organising a fund-raising drive and selling the stickers (auto-colantes) pictured above.

Send money for stickers to Maria Joao Macedo, Rua Prof. Mira Fernandes —lote 20—21, 6 Lisboa, Portugal.

'We count on your solidarity. Please, if you can, buy stickers and send funds so that our creche can become a reality.'

*In solidarity,
Women from Vimieiro.'*



children's meetings

Like Carol Wright (Spare Rib 48) I would like suggestions on what I can do, in this area, which involves being with other adults but where I can also bring my two-year-old daughter. There must be something somewhere which is more mind-stretching than a mother and toddlers group at the church hall.

HELEN MAYNARD
51 HIGH STORRS ROAD
SHEFFIELD S11 7LD

SEND US
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LETTERS
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AND
IDEAS

We are all children in a women's aid house. We decided to have meetings every day. We had a meeting Book. The meetings were to think of ways to help the house. We had a concert to raise money to buy books for the play room cupboard. At the concert we sold tea, cakes, orange squash, lemonade. We sang songs and one girl said a poem. We had a chorus and we sang "In Dublin's Fair City" with some actions. At the meetings we decided who was going to do the jobs in the house like washing up, tidying the garden and hoovering. We were really glad when we first came here but we have been looking forward to a new house. We all think that it would be good if all the children had meetings in all the women's aid houses.

Lots of Love,
"Christopher", "Colin", "Emma"
"Suzanne", "Mary", "Susan"
"Joyce", "Stephen"

DRAWING BY TOM COWLEY

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The new academic year is just beginning so now is a good time to start pushing *Spare Rib* in school and college libraries; (you'll probably have to push extra hard as library budgets have been hit by the government cuts). Also make sure that *Spare Rib* is at your workplace, doctor's waiting room and any other place where people are likely to read it. Remember — we could not survive without our subscription income!

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WHY NOT SHARE SPARE RIB WITH OTHERS?

With this in mind, we are launching a region by region campaign to build support for *Spare Rib* outside London. This has two aspects. One is strengthening our coverage of events and developments outside London; the other is to sell more copies of *Spare Rib* in all parts of the country. These two goals are closely related as, at present, it is only through our readers that we will improve our news coverage.

Our first target will be Birmingham — a real black spot — where, at present, less than 300 copies of *Spare Rib* are sold monthly. Our campaign could include:

- ★ easy availability of *Spare Rib* from newsagents;
- ★ distribution of publicity posters;
- ★ publicity in local press and radio;
- ★ advertising in key spots;
- ★ ensuring that *Spare Rib* is in schools and libraries;
- ★ meetings and a *Spare Rib* bop;
- ★ distribution of old back copies as publicity material.

To do this we need information and offers of help from regular Birmingham *Spare Rib* readers. We want next month's issue to be relevant to women in Birmingham. One way of doing this is to carry stories about Birmingham. It will also help us get newsagents to stock *Spare Rib* and encourage potential new readers to buy a copy.

If you have an idea for a Birmingham news item, please contact Jill Nicholls at *Spare Rib*, as soon as possible.



READERS IN OTHER CITIES INTERESTED IN PROMOTING
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SPARE RIB DISTRIBUTION NOW.

COSMO LISTENS TO THE RECORDS

By Anne Nightingale



K56213

Dory Previn. *We're Children of Coincidence and Harpo Marx.*

If I were the person who hands out gold, silver and bronze medals, Nobel prizes, knighthoods and Victoria Crosses, I'd give them all to Dory Previn for her dazzling talent at putting into words and music thoughts and theories that you and I struggle to express, and then give up in despair. I refer particularly to a poignant piece of poetry called "Woman Soul", to be found on Dory's latest album **We're Children of Coincidence and Harpo Marx** (Warner Bros). It's a beautifully observed song about the way men and women are forced into rigid roles, and their futile struggle to play the "right" part. "Woman Soul" isn't the only piece of gold to be found on this album. For although Ms Previn's sentiments are often serious, she's now putting them over with the razzmatazz of a vaudeville star.

**If anything more needs to be added,
Dory Previn can speak for herself.**

Also available "Dory Previn" K56066



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